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May 1997

Something is wrong with Nintendo 64

There simply aren't enough quality games. But is there hope?

Revealed: The 70 new games that will make or break Nintendo 64

Videogames are good for you!

Senator Lieberman's "got it all wrong," claims M.I.T. professor

As Sony drops the price of PlayStation games to $49, the pressure on Nintendo 64's software library mounts. Has the "game industry's 900 pound gorilla" lost its muscle? Or can, with the help of third parties, Mario & Co. triumph once again? Our report starts on page 40

volume **three**

29

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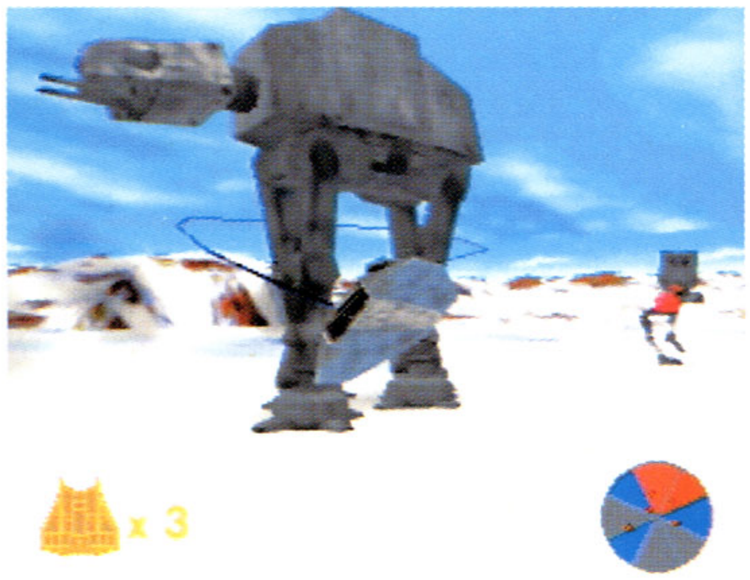
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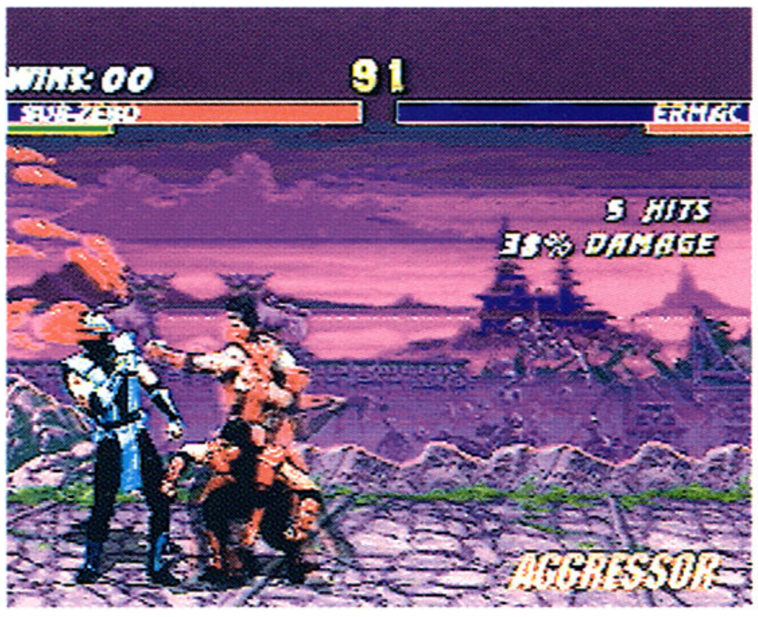

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BOSS


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5 HITS
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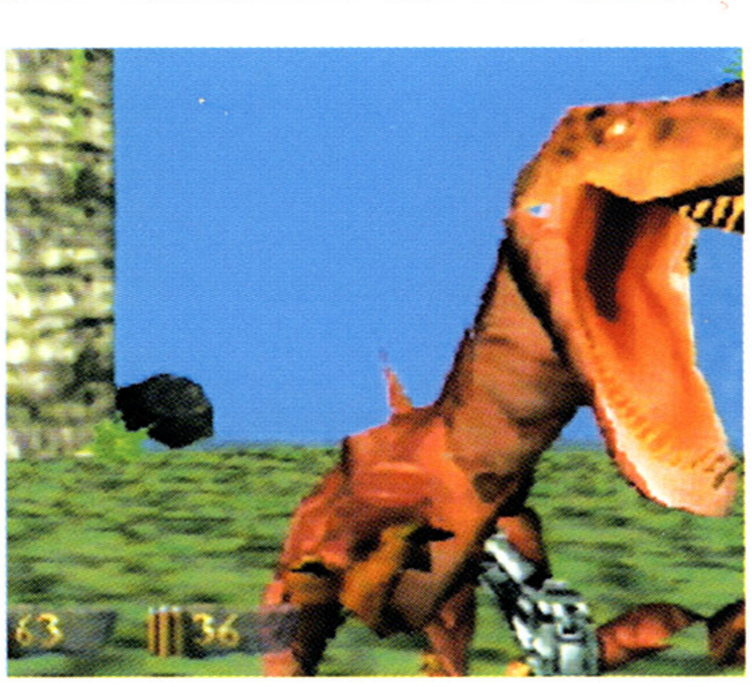

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63
36


75 km/h
SPEED
6
PHOTO
113
SEA LEVEL

NO

Shigeru Miyamoto's *Super Mario 64* redefined videogames. At Nintendo 64's U.S. launch in September of last year, we hailed it as the "greatest videogame of all time" — and we stick by it. *WaveRace 64* and *PilotWings 64* reinforced the message. But since that time, what have gamers who dared to "change the system" been offered? A meager and often miserable collection of no-brainer sequels, out-of-date coin-op conversions, and uninspired originals.

Now, as Sony cuts the price of PlayStation games to $49, introduces a sure-fire series of $25 Greatest Hit titles, and continues to release a broad selection of quality game each month, how do Mario & Company **intend** to answer the accusation from more and more gameplayers that

These games aren't good enough!

NEXT GENERATION

NEXT GENERATION

May 1997

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Next Generation (ISSN# 1078-9693) is published monthly by Imagine Publishing, Inc, 150 North Hill Drive, Brisbane, CA 94005, USA. Periodicals Class postage paid at Brisbane, CA, and additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER** send changes of address to **Next Generation**, PO Box 53680, Boulder, CO 80328-3680. Newsstand distribution is handled by Curtis Circulation Company. Subscriptions: one year (12 issues) US: $34. Canada: $48. Foreign: $58. Canadian price includes postage and GST (GST# R 128 220688) CPC Int'l Pub Mail #0781126.

International Licensing Representative
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Printed in the United States of America.

Next Generation shares editorial with the U.K.-based magazine **EDGE** and is not affiliated with NeXT Software, Inc.

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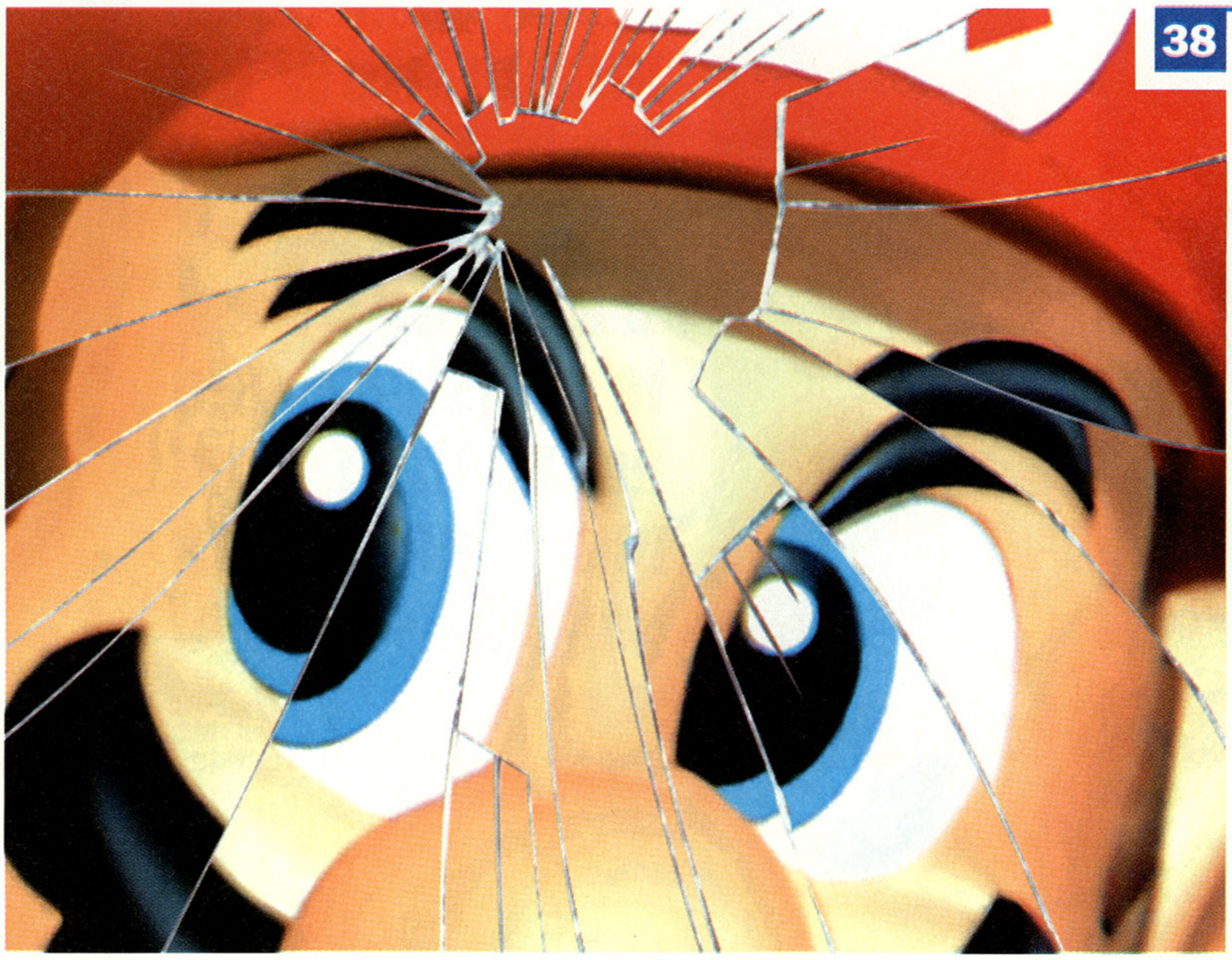
Unsolicited manuscripts cannot be returned or acknowledged. "*Music please?*" An orchestra readies. "*Ahem.*" Pause. "*And now, the end is near, and so I face, my final curta...* (Snip! West, you still have a month to go. Get back to work — Charla)



8

Videogames are good for you!

Senator Lieberman's got it all wrong. At least, he has according to Professor Henry Jenkins, the Director of Media Studies at M.I.T. He thinks that videogames can contribute to the psychological and sociological development of youngsters today

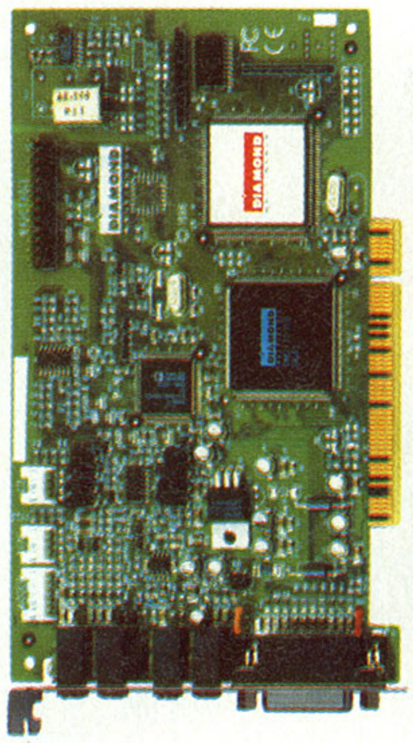


38

Is Nintendo 64 breaking up?

Nintendo promised "high quality not high quantity" for Nintendo 64 software. Has it delivered? Certainly Nintendo 64 games are few and far between, but are they all classics? Unfortunately not. **Next Generation** reports on what the future may hold

introducing





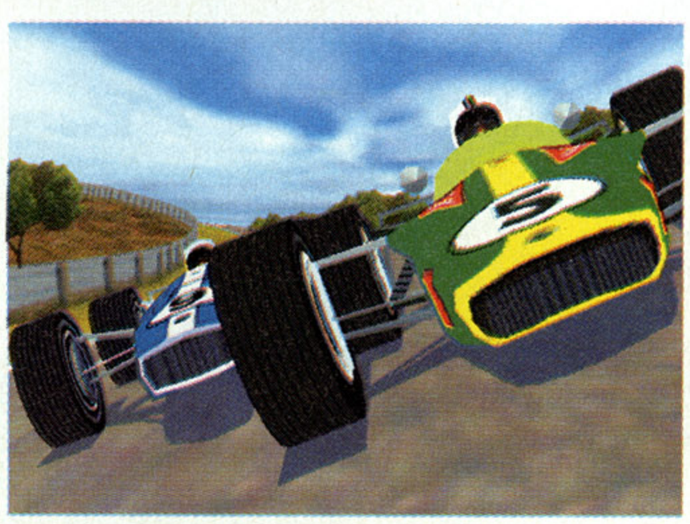


News

Sony drops the price of PlayStation to $149 — but how will Nintendo and Sega react? • Arizona considers making violence illegal in games for minors • Plus, all the regular columns







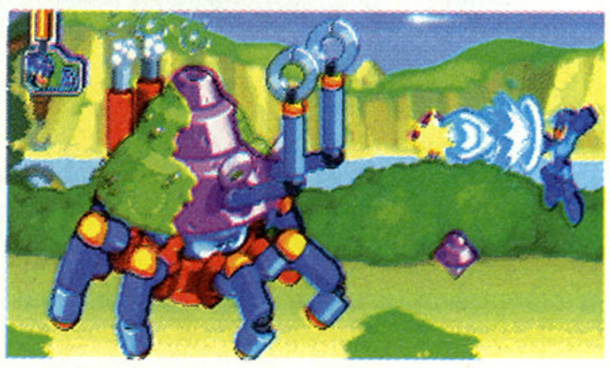


Alphas: 13 games previewed

Games for M2, PlayStation, Nintendo 64, Saturn, and PC previewed. Each month, we take a look at the best games in development around the world and report the story back to you









Finals: 21 new games reviewed

Every month, **NG** reviews each and every major new game release, so you know which ones are really worthy of your hard-earned cash and your valuable time

8 talking

Videogames are good for you!
Have the politicians and scare-mongerers got it wrong? Could videogames actually be *good* for children? An exclusive **Next Generation** interview

16 breaking

News
Gaming news from around the world, including:
26 **Joyriding** (online gaming news)
28 **Arcadia** (coin-op news and updates)
30 **Movers 'n' Shakers** (business news)

38 ng special

Is Nintendo 64 Breaking Up?
We all want the best games possible on this best of all possible systems, but has Nintendo really kept its vow of quality? An **NG** look at the people behind the dream, and a look ahead at the platform's future
47 **Interview with Howard Lincoln**
49 **A Portrait of Hiroshi Yamauchi**
54 **N64 Game Previews**

65 ng software

Alphas
Previewed this month: *Grand Prix Legends* (PC), *Power Crystal* (M2), *Captives* (PC), *Top Gear Rally* (N64), *Manx TT* (Saturn, PC), *Major League Soccer* (PC), *Virtua Striker 2* (Arcade), *Runabout* (PlayStation)

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142 rating

Finals
We separate the goods from the duds. Reviewed this month: *Doom 64*, *Vandal Hearts*, *Command & Conquer*, *Jetfighter III*, *Cruis'n World*, *Descent Maximum*, *Hexen*, *Privateer 2: The Darkening*, *Independence Day*, *Scud*, *Rage Racer*, *MegaMan 8*, *NBA Hangtime*, and *Tiger Shark*

164 corresponding

Letters
Want to make your voice heard? Then write the game industry via **Next Generation**'s letters page

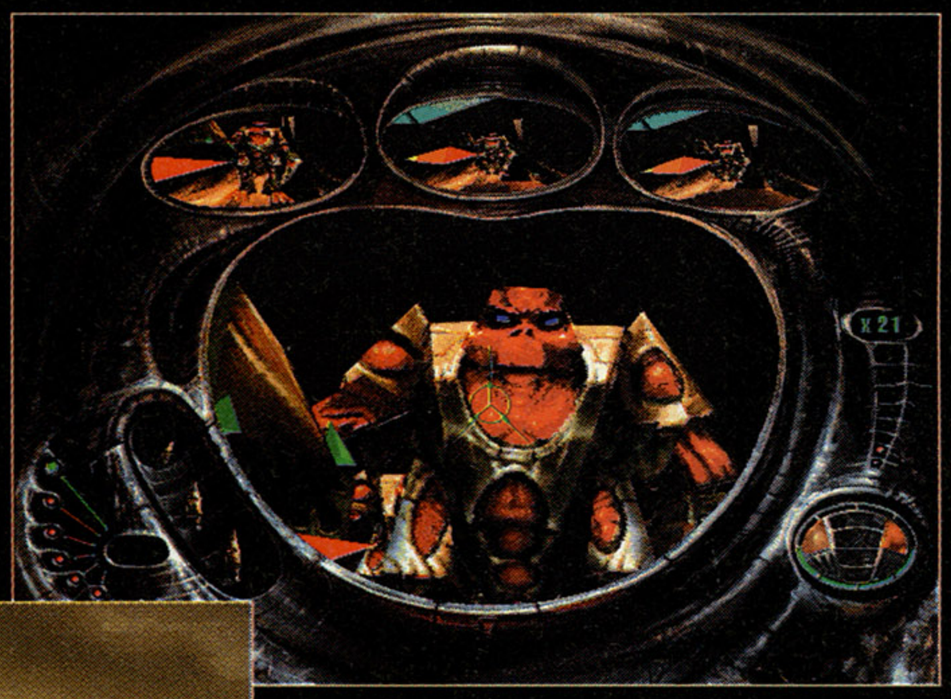
134 now hiring

Game companies are looking for a few good people to play games, make games, and stay up all night

167 ending

Next month...
Next Generation #30 arrives on newsstands on May 13. Turn to page 131 to guarantee your copy





"MDK promises 3-D technology so cool and action so...realistic that it will send everything else running for cover."
– PC GAMER



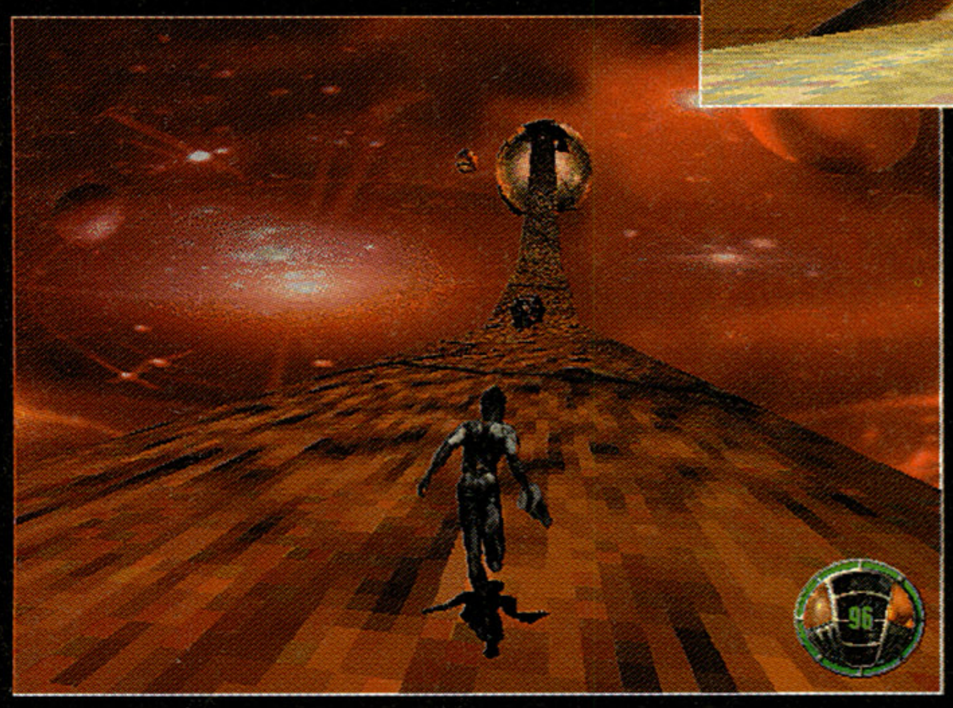
"The ability to zoom in from a mile away within the sniper mode is remarkable."
– ELECTRONIC GAMING MONTHLY

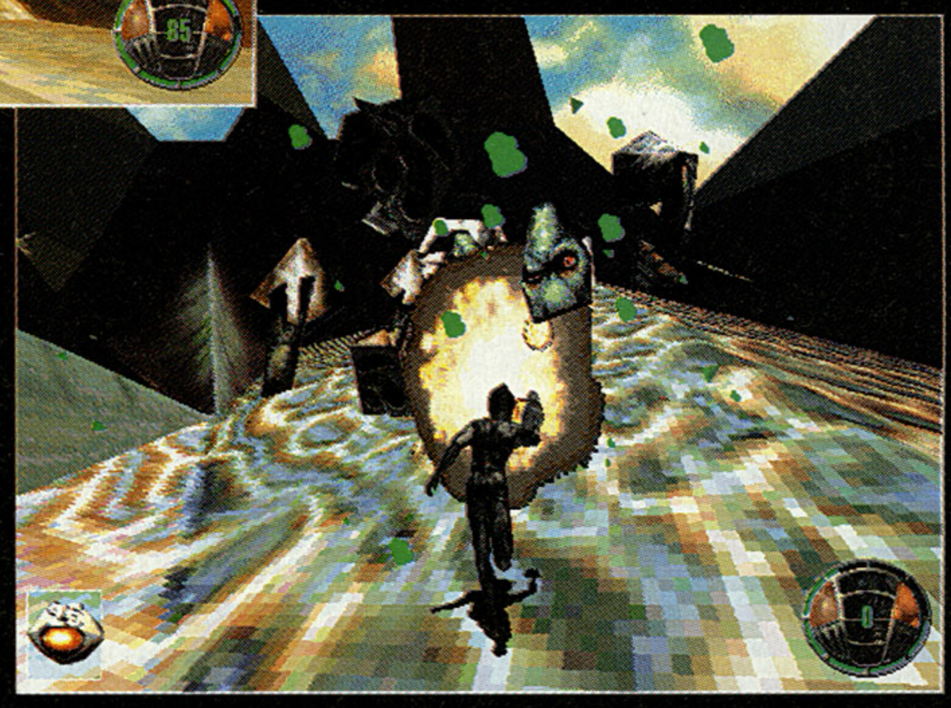
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"One of the most innovative games ever created."
– GAMEFAN



"...we could be looking at a 1997 Playstation game of the year..."
– GAMEFAN

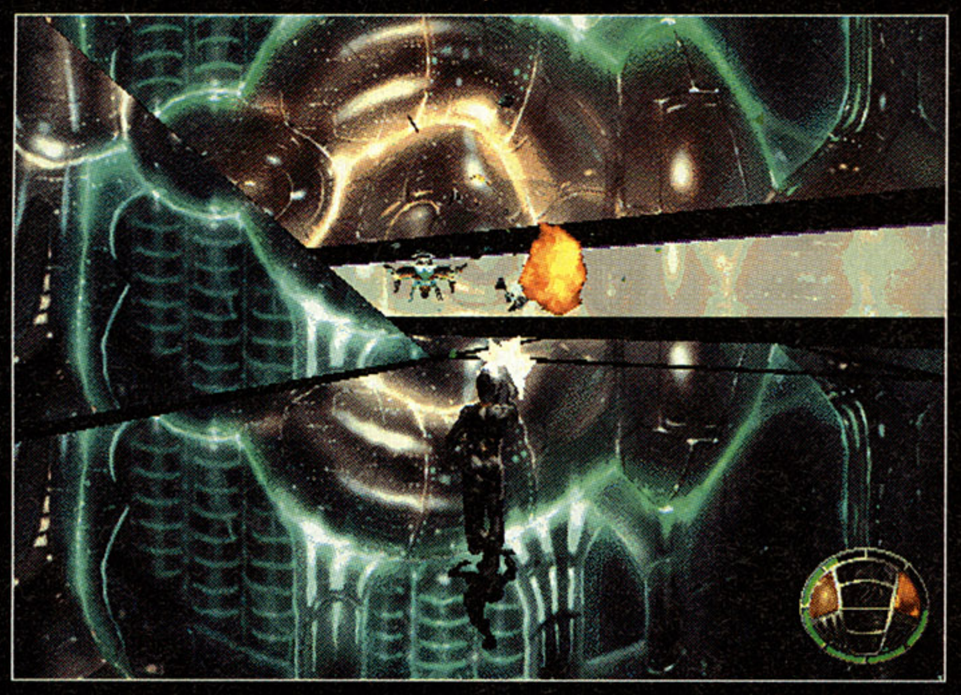


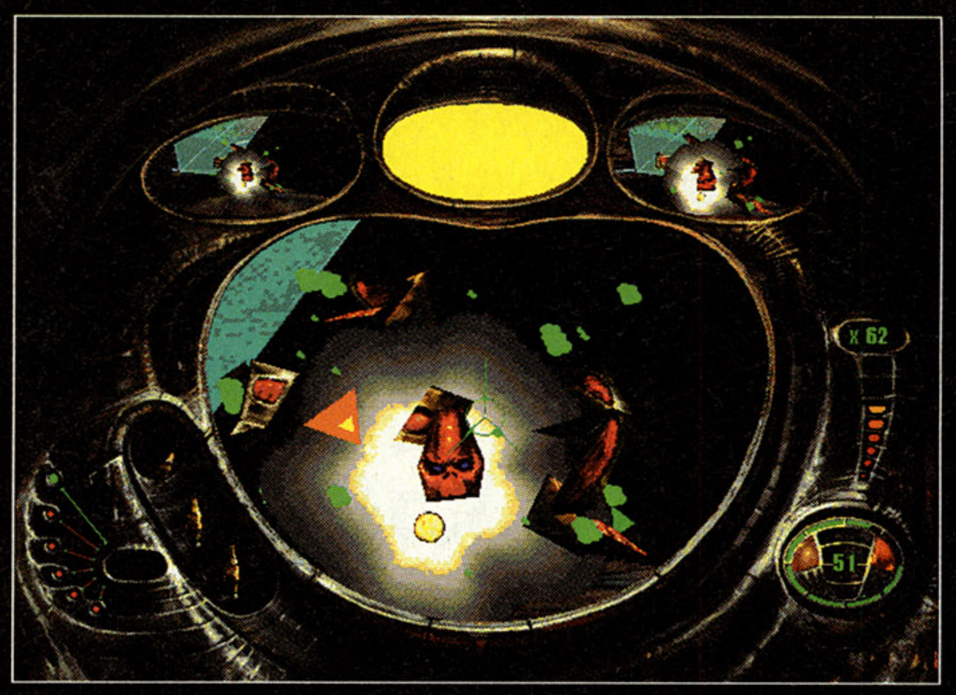


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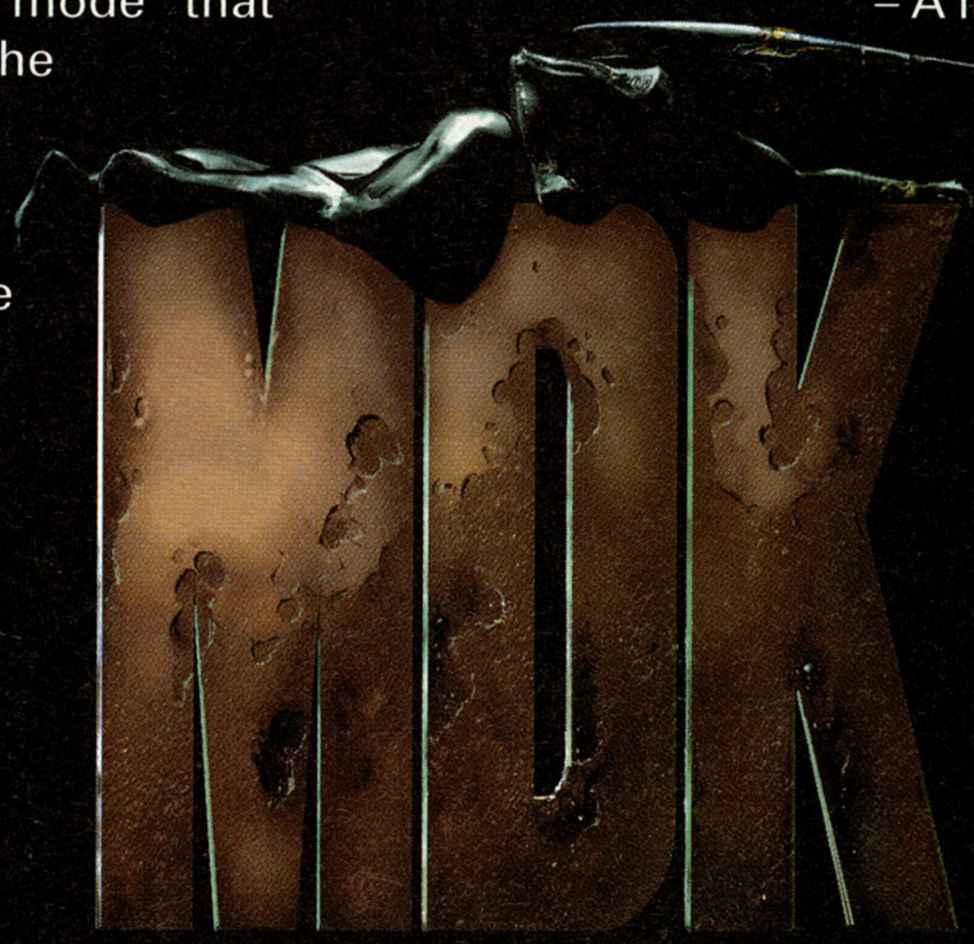




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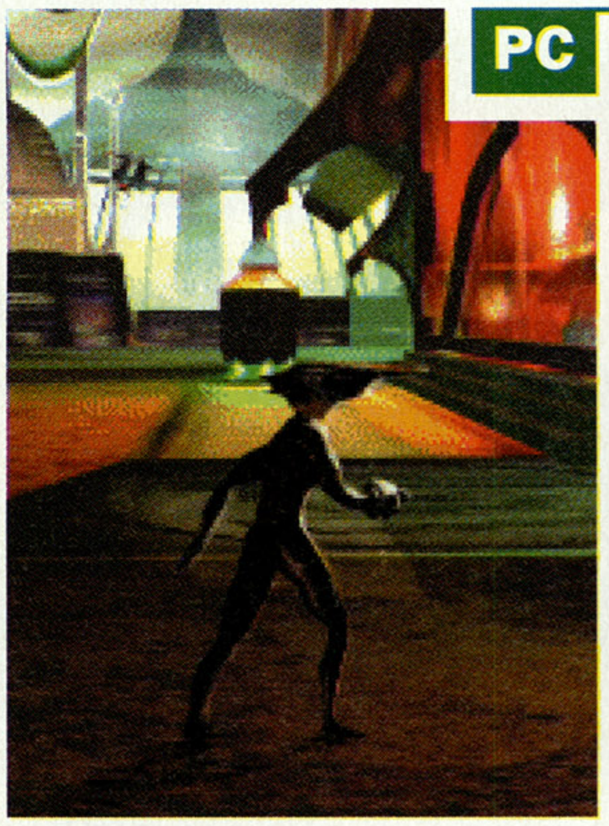
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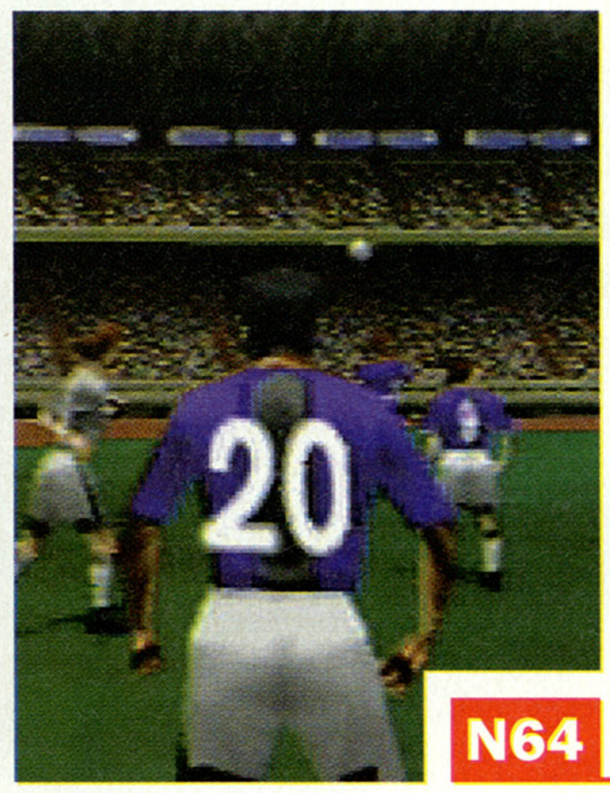
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4 Mac demos

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8 PC demos

Featuring:
Blood by GT Interactive, *MDK* by Shiny, *NCAA Final Four* by Mindscape, *Safe Cracker* by Daydream, *SubSpace* by Virgin, *Tiger Shark* by GT Interactive, *Towers II* by Telegames, *X-Car* by Bethesda

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Senator Joseph Lieberman hopes to help prevent a new generation of axe-wielding psychopaths by stopping children playing violent videogames. Unfortunately though, the beef-headed Senator has got it all hopelessly wrong. At least, he has according to Professor Henry Jenkins of M.I.T. who argues that...

Videogames are good for you!

talking



Photography **Jude Edginton**

Senator Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) argued in his exclusive interview with **Next Generation** last month: "People who play videogames will have a tendency to be more violent in real life." He concludes that although violence is just another part of being human and is nothing new ("Cain killed Abel a long time ago" he acknowledges), "the question is, what do we do about it? Do we try to control it? Or do we create a climate in which violence is encouraged, rewarded, and made more acceptable?" No surprise that he thinks controlling violence is the solution — and that keeping violent videogames away from kids is a step in the right direction. For those of you who missed it, the interview text is available on *Next Generation OnLine* (http://www.next-generation.com).

But wait a minute. Before we all start chucking our copies of *Mortal Kombat* into the trash and wearing "Lieberman for President!" pins, let's hear a different point of view. Let's talk to someone who argues that violence in videogames might actually be a good thing — or at the very least, a safe outlet for natural aggression and simply a new way for kids to do the stuff that kids have always done.

Next Generation visited the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.) in Cambridge, Mass, to talk to Professor Henry Jenkins...

The gaming professor

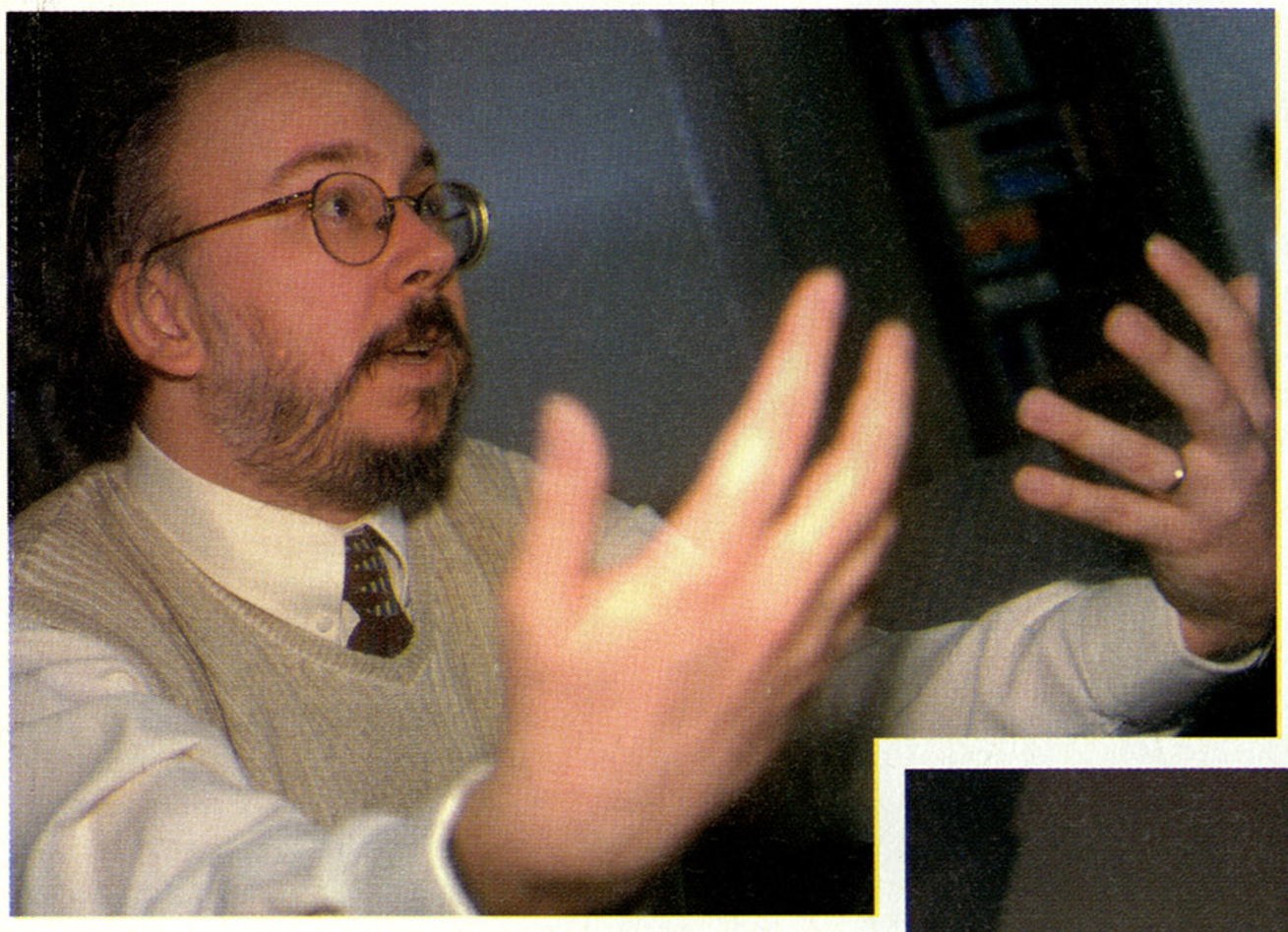
NG: What is your involvement with videogames?

Prof. Jenkins: I am a professor and Director of Media Studies at M.I.T. Much of my work centers around popular culture and its place in people's everyday lives. As part of an increasing focus on the history of children's literature, media, and culture, I've gotten interested in videogames. As part of this, I've done some consulting work with various game companies trying to understand their perspective on game design and development.

NG: What do you think of Senator Lieberman's campaign to remove violent content from videogames designed for children?

Prof. Jenkins: I don't think he's confronting the real problems. I think his focus is on a symptom rather than on the problem. I think it's part of a larger denial of where the real violence in children's lives falls.

Senator Lieberman and his political allies cry crocodile tears over violence in children's media and



proceed to vote to cut down welfare funds for young children, encourage us to try juveniles as adults so that they're thrown into adult prisons, vote in favor of taking illegal immigrants' children out of the public schools, and do relatively little about the financial support that "dead-beat" fathers owe to their children.

We have a whole culture of economic deprivation and domestic violence — and these are the real problems confronting children. But it's easy for politicians in the midst of doing all of this other damage to the lives of children to throw up a smoke screen and to make a lot of noise about "Nightmares before Christmas" involving videogames and technology rather than confront the real material problems that affect children's lives.

"I don't think Senator Lieberman is confronting the real problems. Videogames are pretty low down on the list of places I would start"

NG: Clearly, you have political differences with Senator Lieberman.

But he agrees with you that violence is a fundamental part of every human being and that it is not a new thing. His point is that this is no excuse for letting this violent culture go unchecked, and that violent videogames are an element of this "violent culture" that we could and should control. What is your response to this?

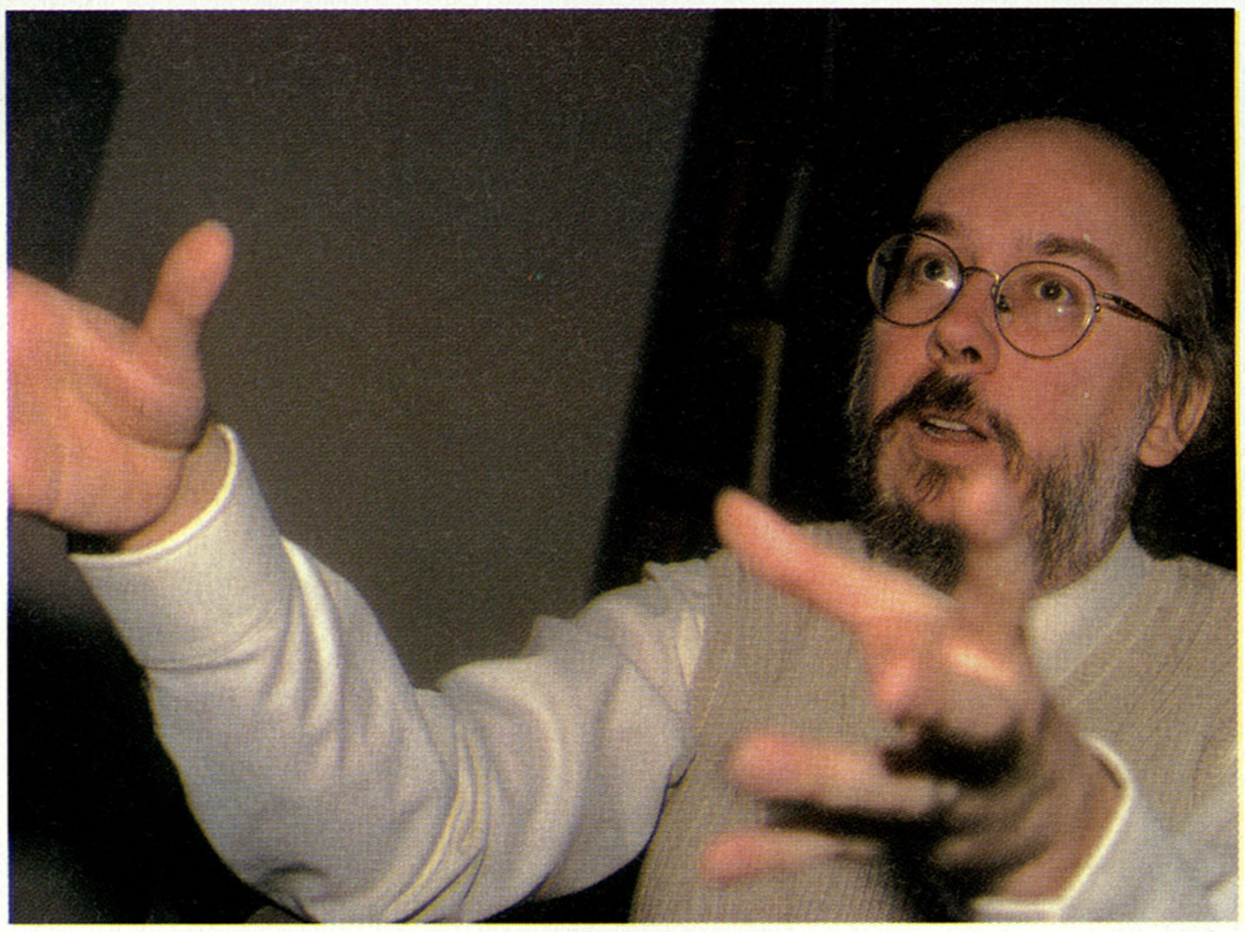
Prof. Jenkins: If you really want to control violence, I don't think you start with videogames. I think videogames are pretty low down on the list of places I would start.

Defending videogames

NG: OK, but given that videogames are high on a lot of other people's lists, how would you defend them?

Prof. Jenkins: To start with, parents often lament that their children are playing videogames instead of playing outdoors in the backyard.

But the reality is that my son has never had a backyard, and the same is true of a large number of children coming of age in America and the western world in general. Due to urban development, children's access to space has been severely constricted over the last 100 years and for many kids in the 1990s no play space is available to them.



NG: So to the parents or anti-videogame campaigners who say it would be better for kids to, say, "Go outside and play football," you'd respond by arguing that for many kids this isn't a practical alternative.

Prof. Jenkins: It's not practical, it's not realistic, and this lack of physical space is one of the things you have to take in mind when you're thinking about this whole videogame debate.

What videogames provide is a "virtual play space." They provide an environment that kids can enter into, interact with, explore, and do many of the things that they traditionally did in the backyard, the empty field, or down by the river in Mark Twain's Mississippi.

NG: So you're saying that the invention of videogames (and with it the invention of "virtual play space") has coincided with a reduction in the amount of real, physical space that a lot of kids have to play in. So one has, in many instances, replaced the other.

Prof. Jenkins: Right, and so to understand what goes on in videogames we have to understand what play space has historically meant to children, especially boys, who are the primary users of videogames.

What we know from the 19th century is that play space was important precisely because it wasn't under the mother's control. The 19th century was a period when the father moved away from working in the home to working in the factory. The mother was now the primary authority in the home, and young boys felt a need to break free of maternal constraints in order to become young boys and then young men. This maturation process required a space beyond the mother's apron strings. These boys performed pranks, stunts, acts of daring, had competitions with each other, challenged each other, out-smarted each other, and there was a kind of camaraderie through competition and through violence.

NG: And videogames are just another way in which this age-old pattern of behavior manifests itself?

Prof. Jenkins: Fist fights are hardly a new development of the 20th century, and we have a description in the 19th century of kids greeting each other by throwing bricks at each other's heads, hurling rocks, sticks, crab apples, and pine cones. There is a kind of violence in backyard play — an aggressive part of coming of age in America — that goes back hundreds of years.

In 1997, we can think about videogames replacing all of those things that were done in the backyard. When you play *Mario*, you have to leap from rock to rock, when you're playing *Tekken 2* you're fighting it out with your fists against an opponent — and in both cases you're enacting the same kinds of things that took place in the backyard play culture of the 19th century or even in suburban America in the '50s and '60s when I was growing up. Whether playing a videogame or playing in the backyard, the same functions are being served — the difference is that now the play space has been moved indoors into the mother's living room.

NG: And this causes problems?

Prof. Jenkins: Right, because now the mother is exposed to and is aware of what boys are doing in their play, and often she is shocked and outraged by what she finds. She finds out her little boys are violent, competitive, and aggressive. And she see the other parts of boyhood previously hidden from adult view.

NG: So all of a sudden a boy's mother is exposed to a side of his nature that she has never seen before. And while this may scare her, it would be wrong for her to think that it was "unnatural" or something that should automatically be suppressed.

Prof. Jenkins: Aggression is a natural part of childhood, and yet we continually try to deny it. Similarly, we deny children's sexuality and are horrified when we find it.

This is not something that's changed over the thousands of years of the history of childhood. Throughout history, children have had sexual feelings, they've had aggressions, they've needed to explore their bodies to find out what they could do and what they're made out of — and all this is a part of being a child. I don't see a lot of real hard evidence that childhood today is any more violent that it was 100 years ago, and I don't see any signs that — try as we might — we are going to eradicate violence or aggression or sexuality in children.

NG: And so this conflict between a boy and his parents is nothing new? Boys have always explored their aggression, and parents have always been shocked to see it?

Prof. Jenkins: Yes. And when, in 1997, we scapegoat a technology, it's just the same thing as when 200 years ago people might have said that children behaved "badly" because they were born evil and that the job of the parents was to beat the evil out of them, or that children were possessed by demons.

Today we say that "technology made them do it" or that "television made them do it," but it's often just a way of denying the reality of children's bodies and natural aggression.

Kids vs parents

NG: So when a boy plays a videogame, in a physical sense he's obviously still in his mother's sight — he's sitting in the family's living room. But in a virtual sense he's out of her sight, because she's not playing the game (and, presumably, she wouldn't know how to join in even if she wanted to).

"Videogames provide an environment that kids can enter into to do many of the things they traditionally did in the back yard"

Prof. Jenkins: Exactly — and this is another one of the reasons why videogames are so popular. Part of developing autonomy from your parents is carving out a social or cultural identity — or simply "space" — for yourself that's not under your parent's control.

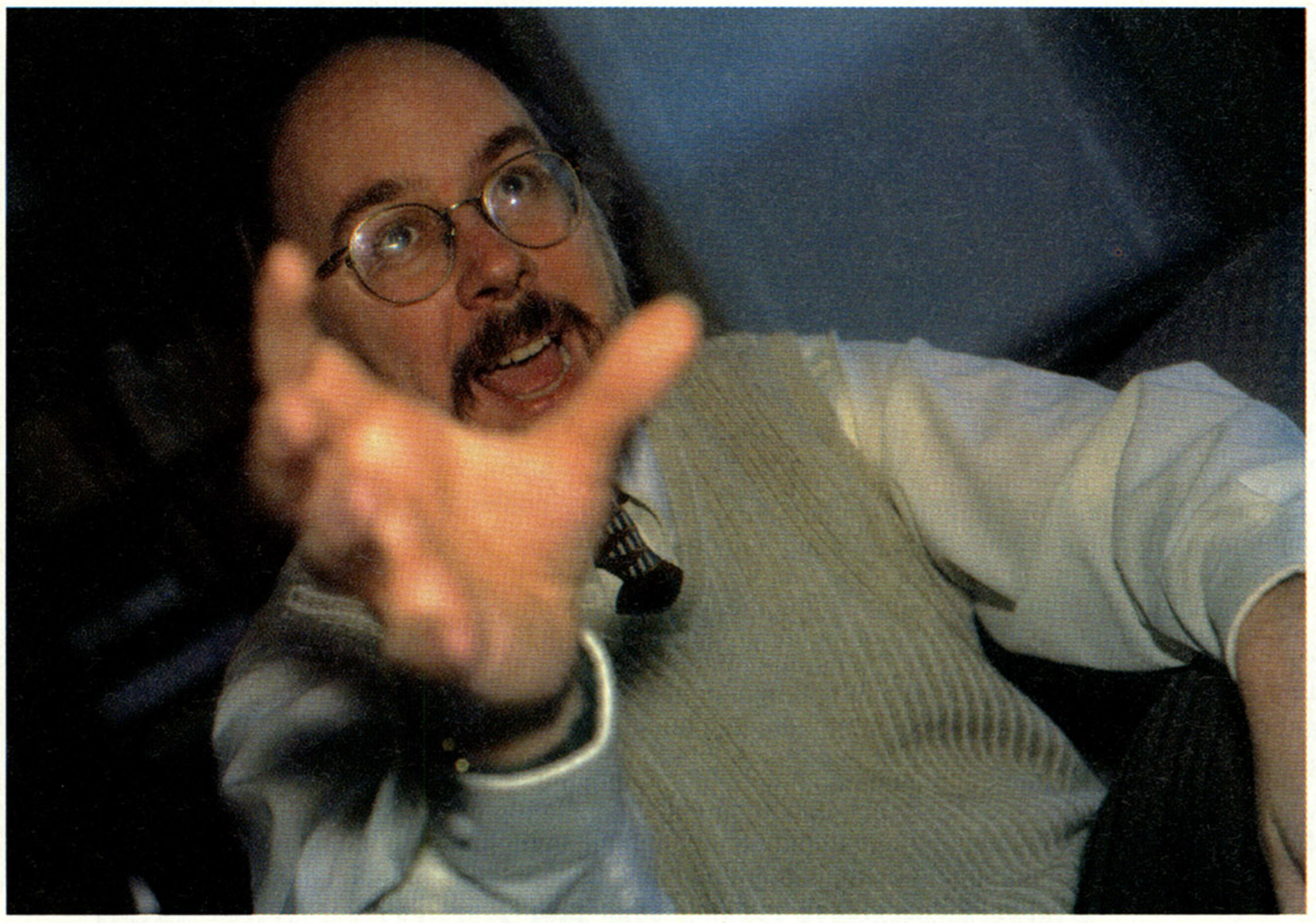
NG: Presumably, then, this also explains why so many parent's don't like videogames.

Prof. Jenkins: Absolutely.

NG: There's probably an element of technophobia, as well.

Prof. Jenkins: Oh yes, aside from the issues of violence and content, a real parental fear is not





knowing how to make sense of the game itself.

Many parents look at videogames and see only a series of colors, splotches, dots, and moving figures. Often they can't figure out which character is being controlled by the joypad. Hence parents often feel a sense of frustration, technophobia, and anxiety about this alien machine in their living room. And this colors their response to what's going on and the issues surrounding videogames. But you have to

"Aggression is a natural part of childhood, and yet we continually try to deny it"

remember that the parental objections may in fact be a necessary part of the attraction for the kid — it is a way for him to begin to assert an identity that his parents don't like or don't agree with.

NG: So you're saying that for a lot of boys, the "virtual playground" of videogames has replaced the backyard as the place where all sorts of boyhood dramas are played out. You're also saying that often this switch is forced upon kids because in 1997 many kids don't actually have a backyard in which to play.

Because parents don't understand how to play videogames themselves (and because videogames offer an alternative, fantasy reality), boys in some way feel as if they are "out of their parent's sight" when they play videogames. Once in this alternative videogame world, they feel free to experiment in activities (often centered around violence and exploration) that would normally take place out in the playground or other places out of their parent's sight. And, unfortunately, this switch causes many parents to react against videogames, for two main reasons: First, because they are naturally a little disquieted by a technology that they don't understand but which is obviously so attractive to their son; Second, because they get a glimpse of their boy's violent, competitive, aggressive, and rebellious sides — emotions that historically have been hidden or at least discouraged.

So in many ways, playing videogames mirrors playing outside. But how are they different?

Prof. Jenkins: Well, first of all I would argue that a videogame is often more healthy than playing outside. Beating up a digital opponent is better than putting your next-door neighbor in hospital, which I did as a young boy in backyard play.

Gaming vs real life

NG: There are other, subtle differences between violence in videogames and violence in real life. Those who would argue that violent videogames are bad for kids often use these differences in their arguments.

Let's take a look at these differences one at a time, and some of the other criticisms that are often levelled against violent videogames.

The first criticism is that whereas a playground is a social environment in which interpersonal interaction is encouraged, videogaming is usually a solitary, socially regressive activity.

Prof. Jenkins: Sure, playing videogames can be a solitary activity. But a videogame in an arcade isn't a solitary experience. And in the home, online gaming technologies increasingly enable kids to interact with each other. Even if we're talking about the single videogame system in the home, my experience is that kids come to the home and perform their skills at the game for each other and call each other on the telephone and trade tips.

There is a whole lot of social activity surrounding videogame play that isn't talked about when they are described as a solitary activity. And again, this social activity is related to a boy's backyard culture.

NG: OK, but the actual playing of the game is solitary. It requires a leap of imagination to "get into" the game that can only be done individually, and once players are playing the game they are not interacting with human beings.

Prof. Jenkins: Yes, suspension of disbelief is a psychological process, but it occurs in a social setting that could well involve other people and often does. I don't see it as a retreat from social interaction; in fact, videogames often encourage kids to move on to other networks of communication, the online world, e-mail, and so forth.

Now, an individual child may be socially isolated, not have any friends, get picked on at school, not feel comfortable going out in his or her neighborhoods, and retreat into a videogame. This could be a solitary pursuit. But to say that all videogaming is this way would be wrong.

Besides, books or movies are the same way. I went to see *Star Wars* the other weekend. There were hundreds of people there who were having that

solitary suspension of disbelief and collectively applauding, stomping their feet, cheering, and reciting the lines.

Besides, reading novels was initially attacked as isolating readers from social interaction — but I hear few parents today arguing that children should not be taught to read fiction.

NG: A second argument often put forward by anti-videogame campaigners is that by exposing kids to violent content in videogames, they will in some way become desensitized to real life violence and will be less shocked or less moved by violence in the real world.

Prof. Jenkins: The studies seem to suggest that children at an early age make meaningful distinctions between fiction and nonfiction.

The violence that really disturbs them is the violence they can't break down — the violence that they see as real. This means that the type of media violence that is worst for children is nature documentaries in which predators eat their prey, or news stories, or documentaries about historical events — all that stuff that teachers and educators and media reformers think would be good TV for kids.

NG: The third criticism is that, to use Senator Lieberman's words, "a kid watching TV is an observer, a kid playing a violent videogame is a participant." Doesn't this involvement change the child's experience?

Prof. Jenkins: A decade ago, the attack on television violence was that it left children in a position of passivity; the violence washed over them and they had no outlet for expressing those feelings which wasn't immediately destructive. We were urged as parents to find creative ways for our kids to express and explore the feelings violence produced. Television was said to produce a hypnotic stupor.

Now, we have an interactive and participatory medium that enables children to release their aggressive feelings through symbolic action, and the same critics are simply reversing their arguments. Now, passivity might be better than participation.

A key problem here is a confusion between fantasy and reality. We enjoy many things in our fantasies which we would not want to act upon in the real world. When the ancient Greeks watched Oedipus put out his eyes and drench the stage with blood, I doubt many kids felt the urge to poke their own eyes out. When earlier generations described Hansel and Gretel shoving the witch into the oven and burning her alive, I doubt many decided to roast their relatives.

As a culture, we have a long history of violent fantasies, which are part of the high culture we want our children to be taught in school, so it seems hypocritical to go after the reproduction of similar stories in a new media or to assume that children aren't making meaningful distinctions between the world of their imagination and the realm of their everyday lives.

NG: A fourth argument is that hopefully a kid in the playground gets punished for violent behavior and learns that it is not socially acceptable behavior. While playing a videogame, however, the same kid is rewarded for violence.

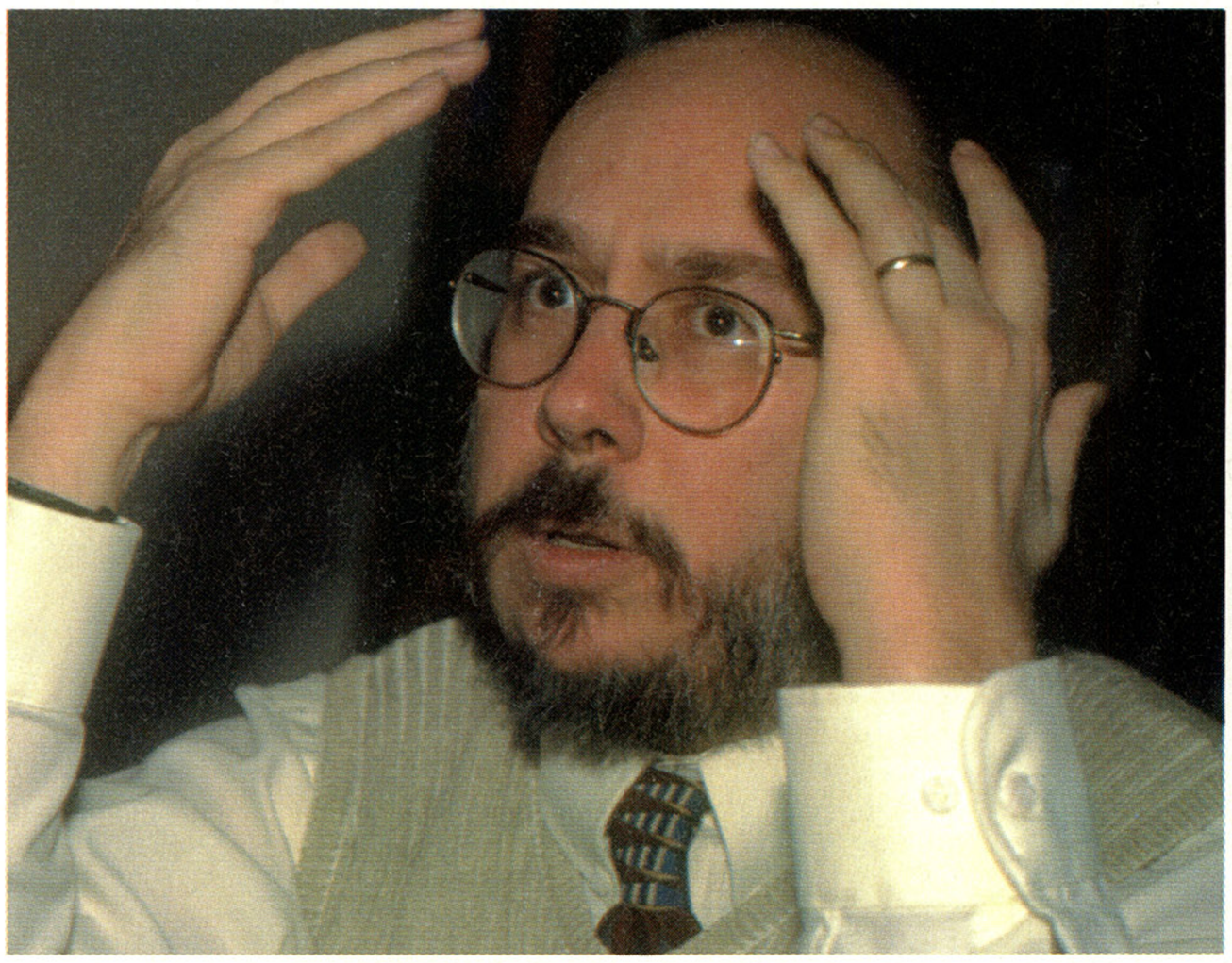
Prof. Jenkins: True — and one of the biggest problems we face is the limited range of plots and situations depicted in videogames. We have too many street fighter games, too many "rescue the princess" plots, and we should all work to broaden the range of representations available to our children. You can't do that through blanket attacks on all violent imagery or through government attempts at regulation; we need to do so by fostering creativity and broadening the marketplace for alternative kinds of games. I would love game makers to return to the world of children's fiction for their inspiration, yet in doing so, we should not be under the illusion that this will get rid of violence. We will simply find violence, trauma, and loss expressed through other kinds of images and with other kinds of consequences.

"The violence that really disturbs kids is the real violence — the stuff that teachers and media reformers think would be good for kids"

NG: A fifth argument often put forward is based on the assumption that a child's play is in many ways a rehearsal for real life. Given, then, that violent behavior is to be discouraged in the real world, shouldn't it be discouraged in play also?

Prof. Jenkins: Maybe, but first you've got to understand what the experience of playing a violent videogame is about. Is it about violence and aggression, or is it about empowerment?

Violence can simply be an expression of the child's need to feel powerful in relation to his or her world. It may not be a desire to hurt people or cause physical damage, but maybe, a feeling of "I need to be in a situation where I'm powerful, where I'm in control, and where I'm bigger than anything that I'm confronting." Because (continued on **page 161**)



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PlayStation price-cut: Nintendo and Sega left reeling after Sony cuts price of U.S. PlayStation by $50 to $149 • **Monster 3D:** PC sound breaks on through to the other side • **Arizona:** Proposing new bills that would make Senator Lieberman proud • **Joyriding:** A new special report on online gaming • **Plus:** All the regular columns



Videogames news like Mom used to make

PlayStation leads drop to $149

Videogames are back in the big time as prices tumble

On Monday March 3rd at 9:50 a.m. Pacific time, the price of PlayStation in the U.S. dropped from $199 to $149 — effective immediately. PlayStation software also dropped in price to $49.95 for all titles, with room for additional retailer discounts. Sony also announced the creation of a new "Greatest Hits" series of $25 titles, kicking off with *Battle Arena Toshinden*, *Face Off*, *Warhawk*, and *NFL GameDay*.

In the U.K., the price of PlayStation had recently dropped from £199 ($300) to £129 ($206), and traditionally the price of U.S. and U.K PlayStations have matched pound for dollar. Although Sony's drop to $149 disappointed those who had hoped for a more drastic discount, it nevertheless represented a $50 decrease and made it the cheapest next-generation system in U.S. stores. It also managed to shake up Nintendo to the extent that one arm of the company appeared to lose all knowledge of what the other was doing.



PlayStation has traditionally been the first next-generation system to drop in price, forcing the hands of Sony's rivals



According to Tokyo newspaper Mainichi Shimbun, Nintendo's Mr. Yamauchi said he would match Sony's drop to $149. Nintendo of America, however, denied it

Nintendo initially responded to the PlayStation price-cut with its traditional nonchalance. George Harrison, Nintendo's VP of Marketing and Corporate Communications offered: "This is not something which we view as a problem. We've been outselling Sony every month since the introduction of N64 and are still working hard to meet demand."

Even when confronted with the notion that the rules of the game change with PlayStation now $50 cheaper — and that in Japan, Nintendo had recently announced a drop in its hardware price from ¥25,000 ($221) to ¥16,800 ($148) — Nintendo of America remained poker-faced. "The bottom line is that we are not surprised by [Sony's price drop] and have been expecting it," claimed Harrison. "We have no plans to drop our prices at this time."

But then, three days later, a Nintendo of America representative

What's Sony's objective?

Although Sony refuses to make any projections about expected sales of PlayStation, enough information came out of its press conference to enable extrapolation. Sony claimed that it would be "hardware constrained" (to have sales limited by the number of PlayStations that can be manufactured) for the foreseeable future, and that its manufacturing capacity is around one million units a month. This leads us to the conclusion that it expects to sell 1 million PlayStations per month, and using existing sales ratios (in January Sony announced that 10.1 million PlayStations had been sold worldwide, of which 3.4 million units were in the U.S — thus one third of all PlayStations end up in U.S. homes), we can figure that Sony expects to sell around 3.8 million units in the U.S. through the rest of 1997. This is assuming, of course, that it's manufacturing capacity remains constant.

"This is not something which we view as a problem. We have no plans to drop our prices at this time"

George Harrison, Nintendo

confirmed to **Next Generation** a story in Tokyo newspaper *Mainichi Shimbun* which quoted Nintendo's president Mr. Yamauchi as saying that Nintendo 64 would indeed be discounted in the U.S. to $149. "This is the price we have been thinking of offering the N64 at from the beginning," Yamauchi declared, according to Mainichi Shimbun. "Now we can make the price lower because of [reduced costs associated] with mass production." But then, as soon as the expected price drop from Nintendo seemed certain, Nintendo of America bizzarely withdrew its representative's earlier confirmation of this report and restated its intention to remain at $199 and "see what happens."

Meanwhile, Sega said it would not move to a price-cut as a result of any moves from competitors. "Sega is more focused on the Sega Saturn customer than on the competition," offered Lee McEnany, Sega of America's VP of Communications, "and Sega currently has no plans to drop the price of the Sega Saturn hardware. We believe the long-term value to gamers lies in software quality and pricing."

But many expect this to change in the weeks ahead. Surely Saturn has to at least match the cut to $149 if it intends to stay in the race.

So what does this mean for the U.S.? Prior to PlayStation's price-cut, Nintendo 64 was outselling PlayStation. But this was on the wave of a launch honeymoon, and at an equal price. As of the end of last year, Sony had sold 3.2 million PlayStations in the U.S., and Nintendo had sold 1.7 million Nintendo 64s — in just three and a half months on sale. That Nintendo 64 could close up PlayStation's headstart under the old $199 status quo is probable — and the situation has to be regarded the same at $149, but if/when Nintendo 64 matches this price drop, it'll probably all come down to software — and **Next Generation** has some strong feelings about this (see page 38).









Quality games for just $25? Sony's new budget lineup is a strong move that Nintendo can't match

Late News

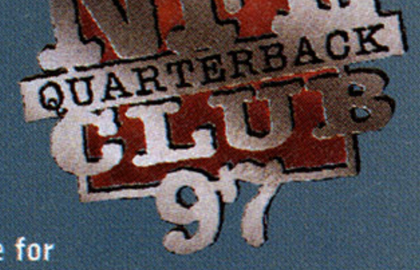
On the day Next Generation was going to press, Nintendo announced a $50 price-cut on Nintendo 64, taking the system price down to $149. That videogame systems are once again closing in on the "magic" sub-$100 pricepoint is good news for everyone.

ng

In the studio

Next Generation's inside look at the world of game development...

While EA VP Bing Gordon expressed doubts as to EA's future as a major contributor to Nintendo 64, other publishers have jumped on the Nintendo 64 sports wagon. Acclaim has announced that a version of its popular *Quarterback Club* series and a *Major League Baseball* title will be making its way to Nintendo 64. Konami has voiced its intention to produce a basketball title for Nintendo 64, and speculation is growing that it will be a part of the *In The Zone* franchise. Nintendo itself is working on an as yet-unnamed basketball game for their system. No word on release dates for any of these titles, but EA's *FIFA '97* for Nintendo 64 should be available soon.



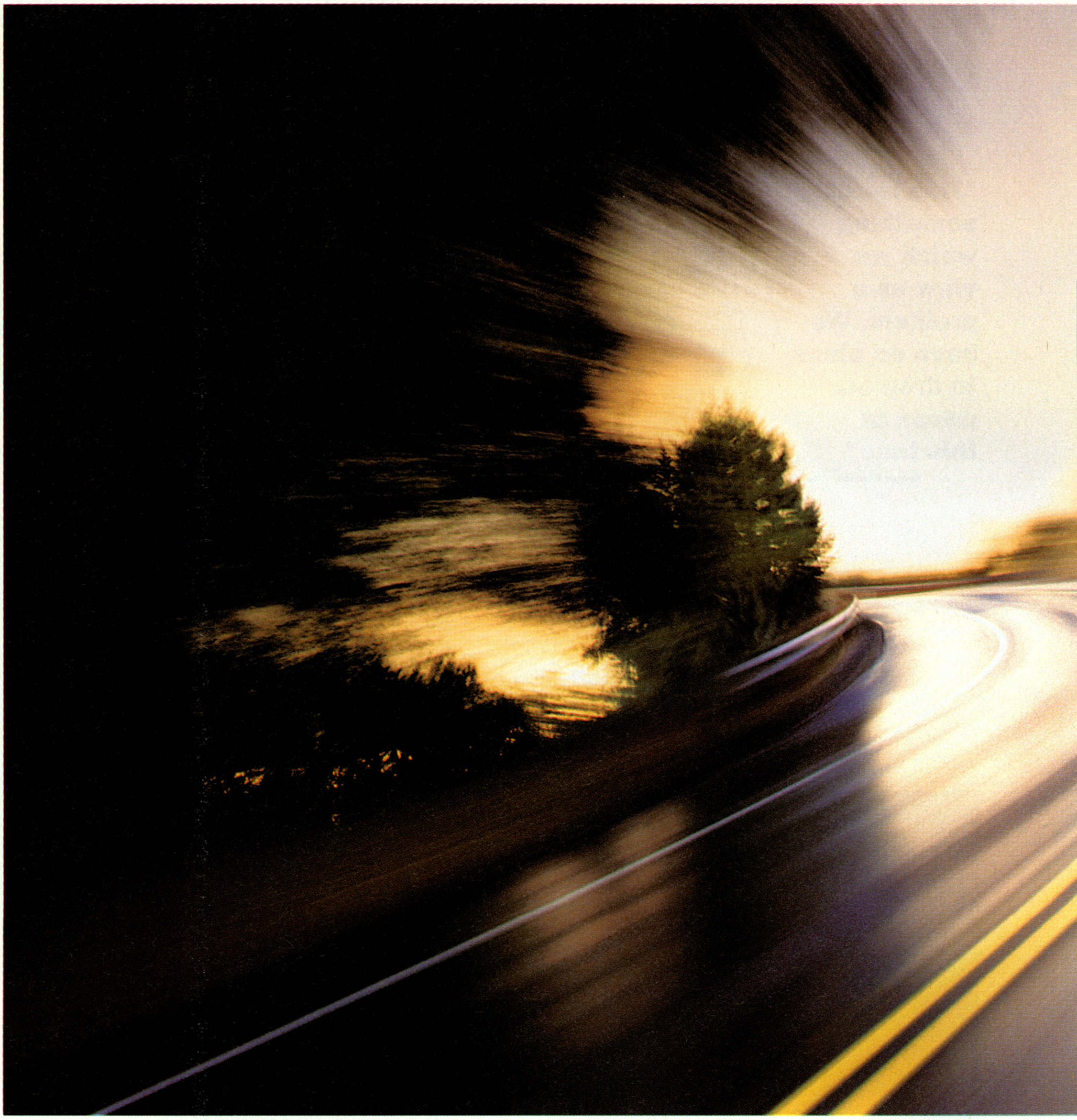
Darkstalkers 3 **will be appearing on home consoles. At press time, the game still hadn't hit arcades, but Capcom says it will be released on PlayStation and Saturn by the end of 1997. The latest installment will be known as *Darkstalkers: Jedah's Damnation*. Four new characters will appear, and most of the previous characters are returning; however Phobos, Pairon, and Donovan have officially been dropped.**

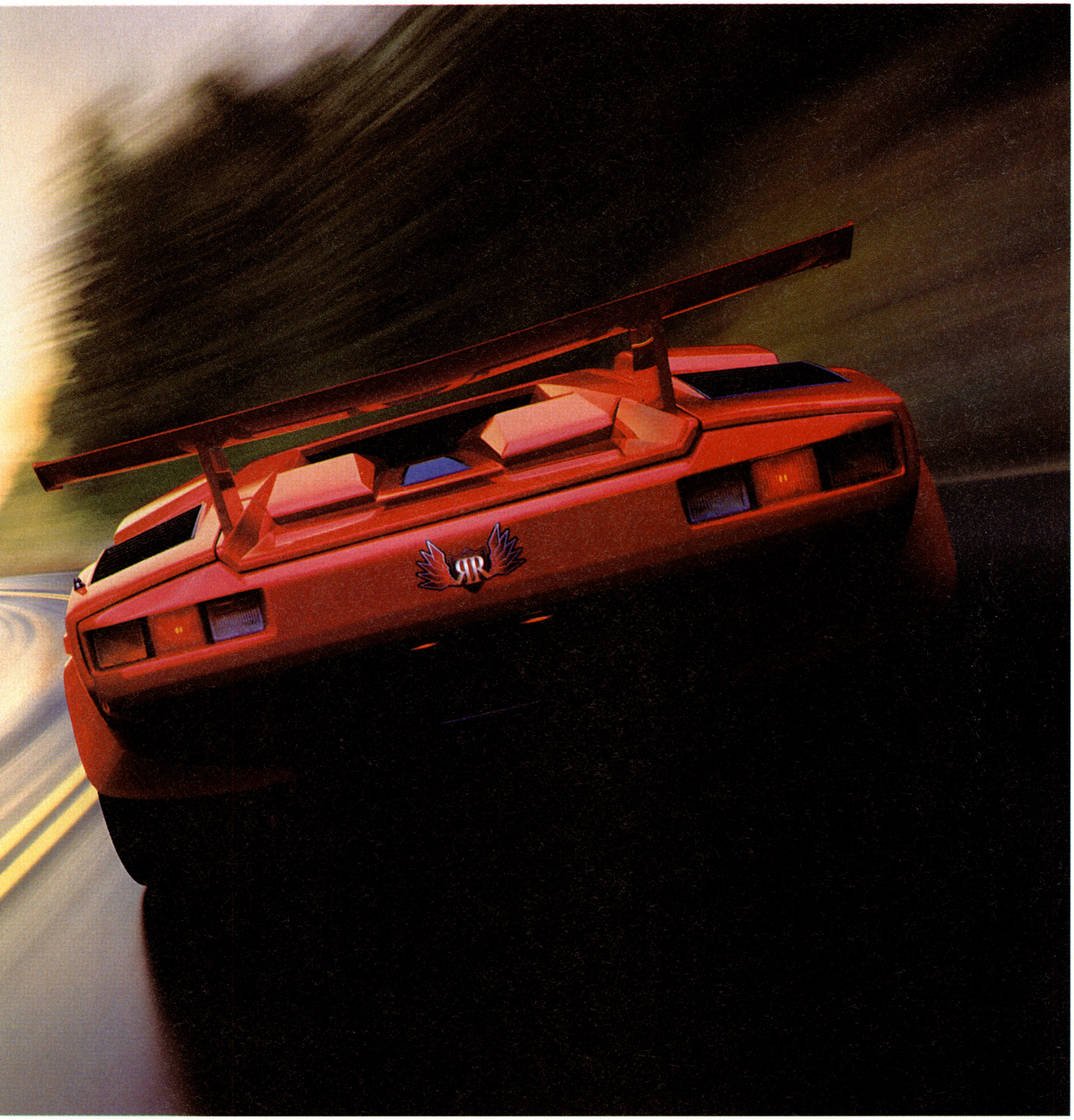


Sony of Japan's internal development unit is working on a *Zelda*-style RPG entitled *Alundra*, the first action RPG for PlayStation. The game is slated for a Japanese Q2 '97 release and boasts over 7,000 screens. In the role of the title character, players are given the power to enter people's dreams. All battles are fought in real time on the main screen. Thus there are no intrusive load times when entering battle. The producer, Yasuhiro Oohori, is best known for his involvement with *Land Stalker*, and the map designer, Kenji Orihara, is regarded for his contributions to the *Shining Force* series. There is no word yet on a U.S. release for the game, but with the obvious void of action RPGs, it is likely to be translated.

Former Bullfrog employees Mike Diskett and Guy Simmons have left the company to launch the oddly named Mucky Foot Productions. The firm's first-title — details of which have not been released — will be entitled *Dark City*. Simmons and Diskett had been project leaders on such Bullfrog games as Theme Park and Magic Carpet. It is understood that the move has no relation on Bullfrog boss Peter Molyneux's desire to quit the company he founded.

Australian publisher Beam has relaunched the ancient Melbourne House brand after years of neglect. Melbourne House was best known in the early 1980s for such titles as *Way of the Exploding Fist*, *Lord of the Rings*, and *The Hobbit*. Beam has reintroduced Melbourne House to the worldwide gaming public with its real time strategy war game, *KKnD: Krush, Kill 'n' Destroy*.





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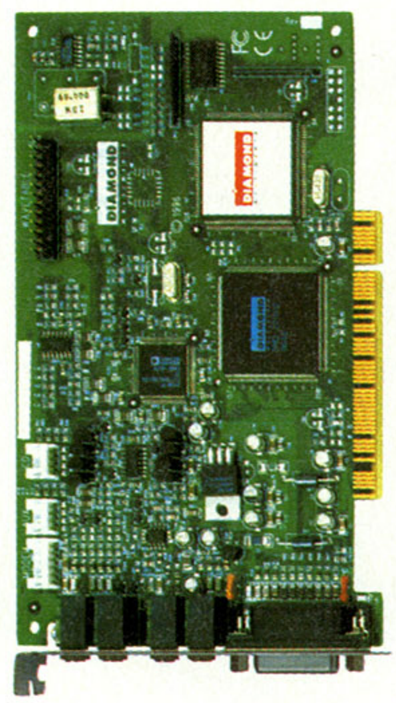
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PC Sound Finally Breaks Out

The next front in PC hardware wars will be in audio accelerators, many offering full 3D sound

While graphics adapters in general, and 3D graphics accelerators in particular, have seen tremendous leaps in power and capabilities since the introduction of Windows 95 and Microsoft's suite of DirectX APIs, PC audio has done little to move away from its DOS-based origins. Indeed, most PC games today sound little different from their DOS forebears, remaining tied to Creative Labs's 16-bit, ISA bus SoundBlaster standard, which merely plays back the digital audio, leaving computationally intensive tasks such as mixing audio streams or bit-rate conversion to the CPU.



Help is on the way with the scaleable architecture of Microsoft's DirectSound and DirectSound3D APIs. Like other DirectX APIs, DirectSound and DirectSound3D reside between software applications and the user's hardware, deciding how an operation called upon by the application can be best handled by the available hardware configuration. This introduces the interesting possibility of using a sound card with its own on-board processor to handle audio operations. If such hardware were present, DirectSound would simply pass on those operations to the card in question, freeing the CPU.

Such cards are coming. The first out of the block is Diamond's Monster Sound accelerator, based around Diamond's own Freedom 5600 multimedia ASIC, with a programmable DSP and audio CODEC technology licensed from Analog Devices. Using the much higher bandwidth PCI bus, the Monster is capable of up to 24 independent audio streams and quad-speaker output, all running through DirectSound and putting little demand on the system's CPU. In addition, the programmable DSP enables the expansion of the card's capabilities, and Diamond already has plans to upload an AC-3 surround sound patch to its web site shortly after the card becomes available — probably by the time you read this.

In addition, Monster Sound uses Aureal 3D (A3D) positional sound technology from Aureal Semiconductor. A3D is based on nearly a decade of psycho-acoustic research, during which a dynamic sound "map" was created by measuring the acoustic properties of sound as it approaches human ears from every direction. By re-creating these acoustic patterns, it's possible to fool human ears into believing sounds are coming from a particular direction using only two speakers. Demos given to **Next Generation** staffers were quite impressive, as a wide range of music and sound effects surrounded the listener in startling ways, all of which was conveyed through a simple pair of headphones. Through the Monster Sound's quad-speaker setup, the effect was even more pronounced.

Aureal is the first company to take advantage of Microsoft's DirectSound3D API, which has the potential to usher in a new era in immersive gaming. Imagine playing *Quake* and actually hearing a Shambler creep up behind you. The experience is frightening, and a large number of game developers have signed on to include Aureal's technology in future games, including Activision, Eidos, Electronic Arts, Epic, LucasArts, Microprose, Psygnosis, Sierra, Spectrum Holobyte, Virgin, and Westwood Studios.

All this makes it clear that PC sound is ready to break rather dramatically with its ISA origins, and gamers will be among the first to benefit from it. ng



The heart of Diamond's Monster Sound 3D card (center page) is the Freedom 5600 (above), which uses Aureal's A3D positional sound DSP to produce 3D sound from two speakers

STOP press

Shiny Hunts *Tomb Raider* Duo

Shiny Entertainment is on the verge of hiring the two leading names behind *Tomb Raider*. Toby Gard, the man responsible for *Tomb Raider*'s award-winning concept and design, and lead programmer Paul Douglas. Core Design is denying the whole story, but Shiny's boss Dave Perry commented: "Believe me, they're leaving," adding that the two have handed in their notices at Core. Nevertheless, no contracts have yet been signed, and Core is unlikely to lose two star names without a fight.

Nintendo Rejoices at European N64 Launch

Nintendo is claiming record sales of N64 for its European launch, predictably claiming that first-day sales have outstripped all previous hardware launches. Equally predictably, these claims are being disputed by Sony. No figures are available for Europe as a whole, although *Next Generation OnLine* understands the 20,000 units allocated to the U.K. have all gone, and that a further 11,000 are due to be air-freighted in next week.

China to Fight Foreign Videogames

China's Government wants its country's youth to stop playing imported games, and start playing officially sanctioned titles after a survey conducted at Quingua University. "Seventy percent of [foreign] games advocate violence, terrorism or greed," a university spokesperson said, "[and] around five percent promote Nazism and militarism."



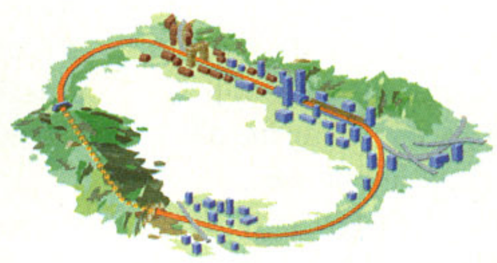


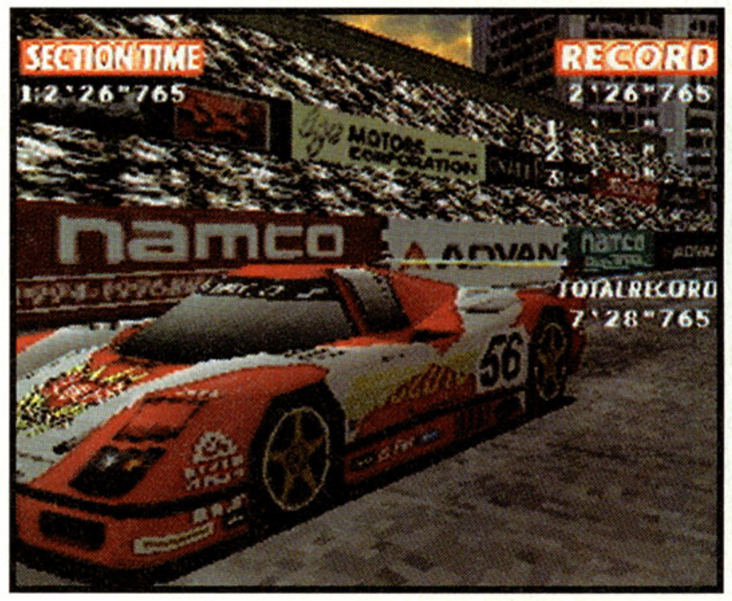




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Violent Content Defined and Rejected

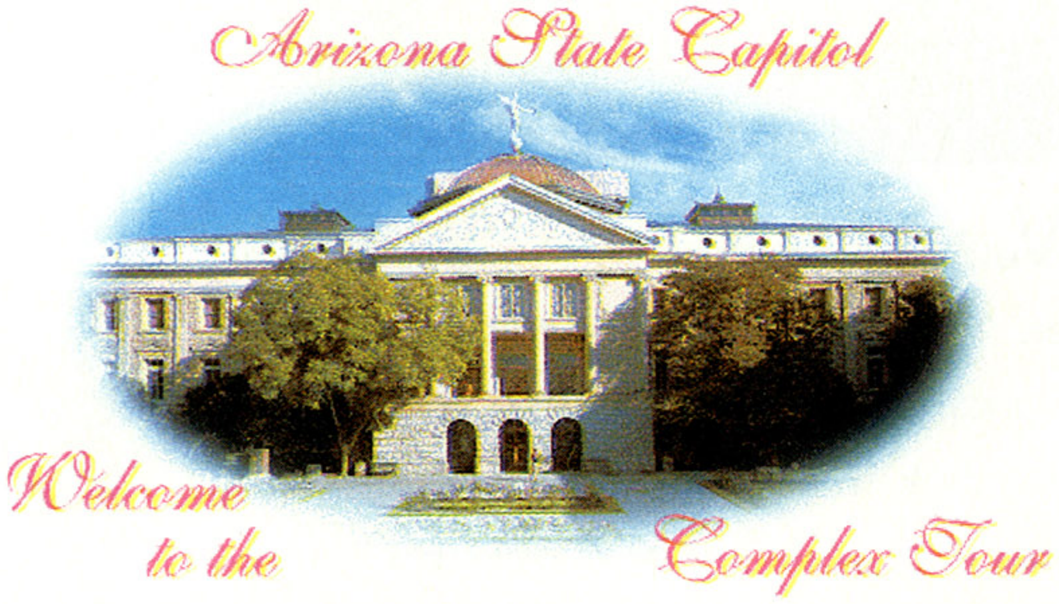
The state of Arizona is set to pass the most restrictive videogame censorship law yet

Violence? "Violence means graphic, bloody depictions of torture, sexual assault, cannibalism, mutilation, murder and urination or defecation that occur in a morbid or violent context. Violence does not include animated, bloodless violence." This is how the Family Services committee of the Arizona State Senate defines violence in Senate Bill 1433, which took its first step toward becoming law on February 13th with a three-to-two preliminary vote. Sponsored by Republican Senator David Petersen, SB 1433 would make it unlawful for a person, with knowledge of the character and content of the item involved, to distribute a game that visually depicts "violence" to a minor.

At press time, SB 1433 has passed through two of the four steps (Family Services committee and the Judiciary committee) necessary to make it into state law. The two remaining hurtles are the Rules Committee and finally the Senate Floor where the bill can officially be passed into law. In the past, similar bills have been voted down because of vague definitions of violence; it's not impossible that the same will happen to SB 1433, but so far the bill is moving through the legislative channels enduring only a few softening amendments along the way.



Should SB 1433 make it into law, the guidelines set forth by the ESRB will be enforceable by law



Currently working its way through the Arizona State Senate, SB 1433 will be the most restrictive videogame law to date

What makes SB 1433

potentially dangerous is the shifting of responsibility from game publishers to retailers. While the push to provide ratings for videogames was centered squarely on publishers (a form of self-regulation), this bill is aimed directly at retailers and represents a more direct attempt at eliminating objectionable material from the marketplace all together. According to Frank Alizaga of Activision (publishers of the M-rated *Legacy of Kain*), "We may not have sales directly in Arizona (if the bill makes it into law), but I'm sure they'll come indirectly. If anything, it will probably be an upswing for us because people will know this is a violent game and that's what people like."

The bill is being proposed as a Class 1 misdemeanor offense and thus allows a maximum punishment of up to six months in jail and fines up to $2,500. Traditionally speaking, an offense of this nature would probably result in probation or some other less serious punishment, but even with the misdemeanor status of the bill, it's unlikely that videogame retailers in Arizona are going to risk fine and public scorn by selling such material. If history tells us anything retailers will likely adopt a "better-safe-than-sorry" attitude toward questionable material especially when considering a "law" as subjective as 1433.

In its current form, SB 1433 has lost some of the original proposal's bite. At its inception, the bill not only included videogames but also movies, magazines, and computer-generated images. Equal emphasis was puts on displaying objectionable items where minors could see them. As it stands now, the bill is specifically designed only to enforce the current standards set forth by the Entertainment Software Rating Board. This way, the videogame industry will become much more like the motion picture industry where "legally" children under 17 are not admitted into an R-rated movie, and so on and so forth.

If SB 1433 makes it into law, it will presumably be enforced more strictly than the motion picture industry — at least for a while. What's most dangerous about this and other laws that attempt to regulate morality is the precedent it could set for more ambitious censorship initiatives in the future: Next Generation hopes the people of Arizona proceed with caution. ng

Retailers will likely adopt a "better-safe-than-sorry" attitude toward questionable material, especially considering a "law" as subjective as 1433



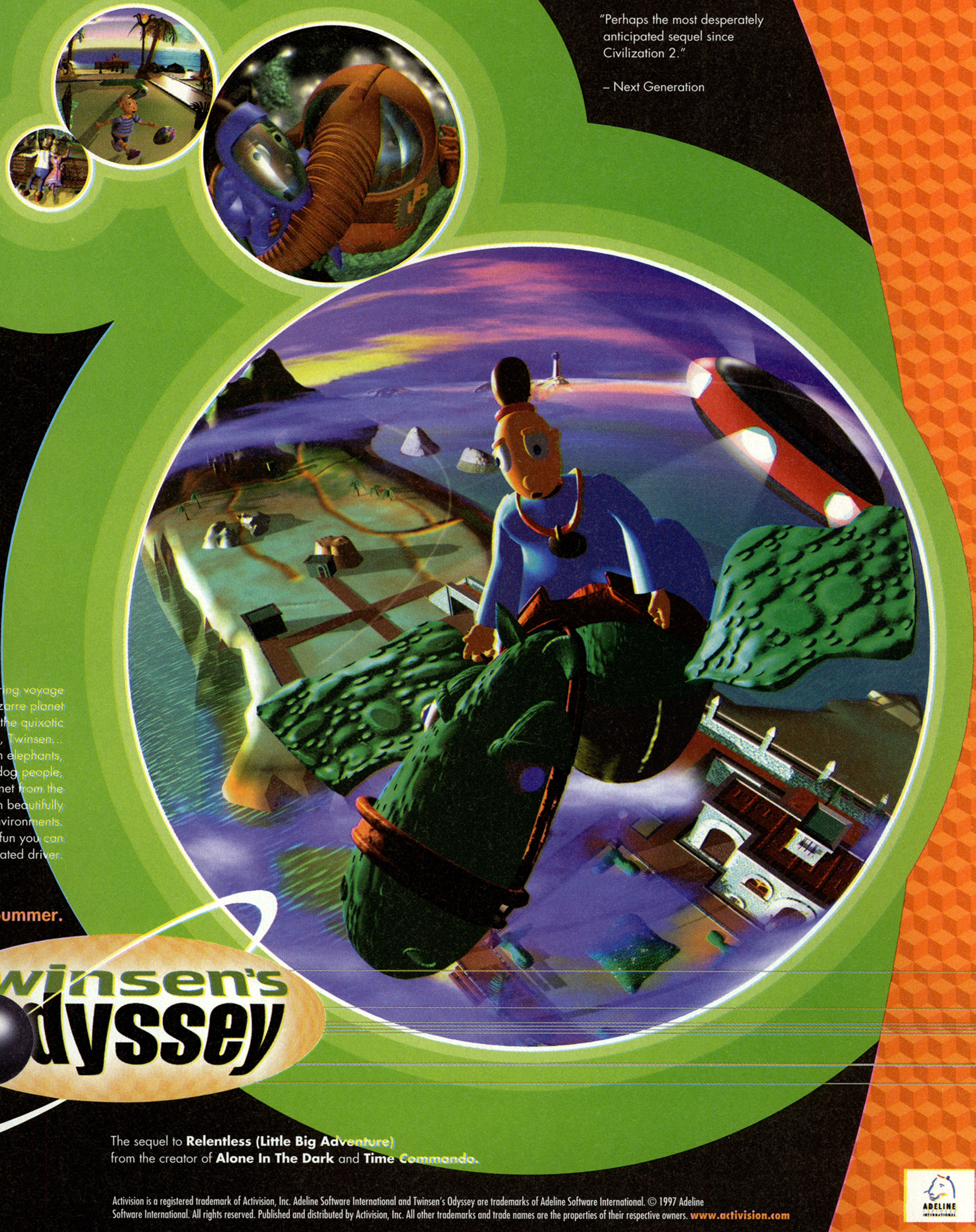
Arizona retailers could soon be facing six months in prison for selling a game such as Activision's *Legacy of Kain* to gamers under 18 years old

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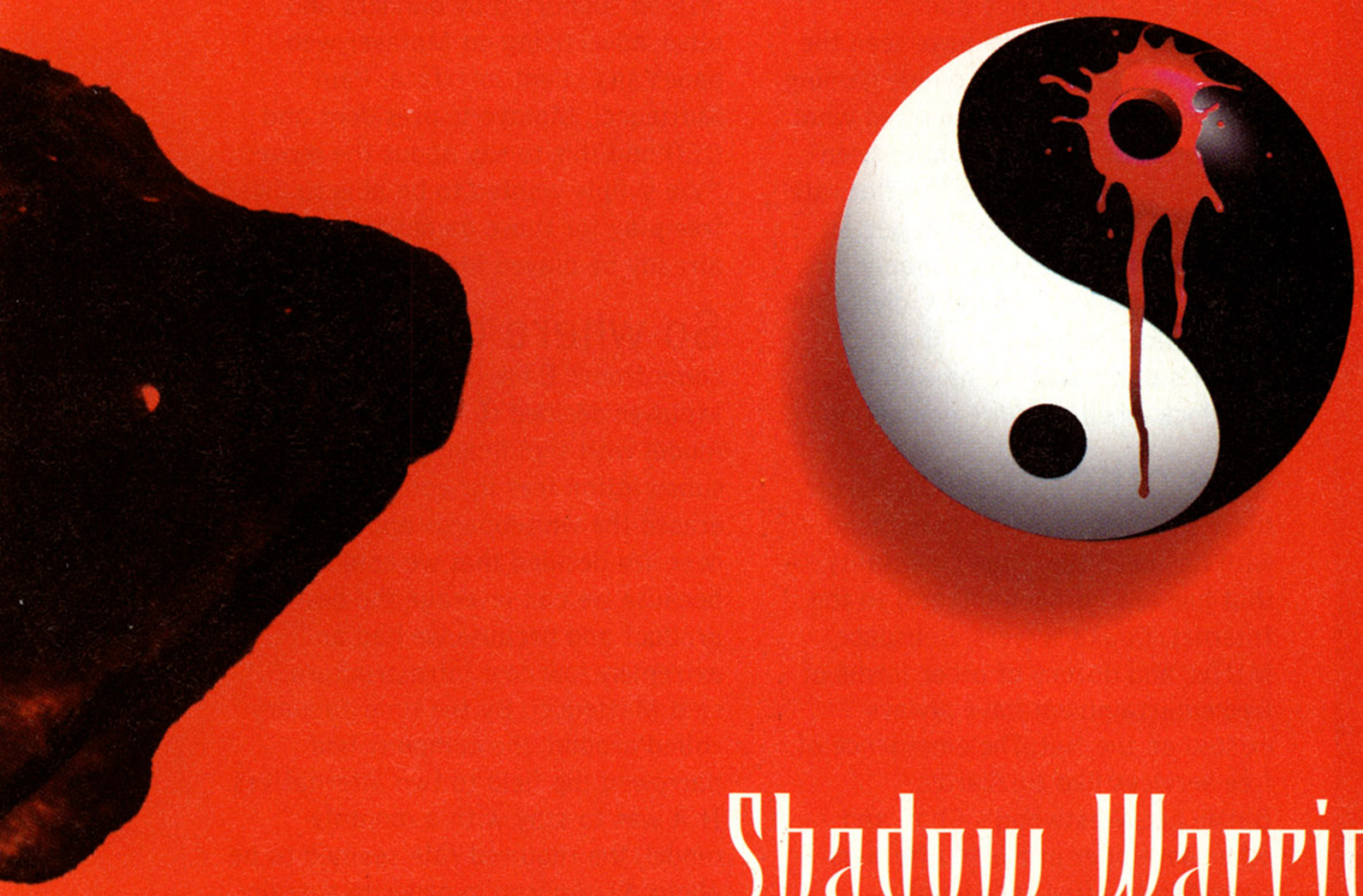
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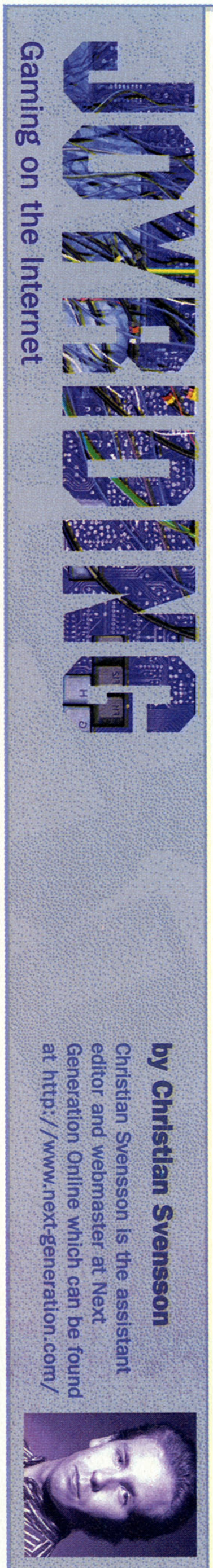
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Crib sheet

Stuff every gamer should know. This month, we look at games via cable

No. 9 Games by wire

You mean downloading off the Internet, right? That too, but as an alternative to carts, companies have tried all kinds of ways to get games to gamers.
Like the Sega Channel? That's the most recent version of games over cable, but Mattel tried the same thing for the Intellivision, called *Playcable*, in June 1980. The idea itself seems to have originated with Ralph Baer, the inventor of the Odyssey, as far back as 1968.
What about Xband? That was new, right? Nope. William Von Meister, founder of the online service The Source, introduced a gaming service called Gameline for the Atari 2600 in 1983. Players bought a "Master Module" cart, which had 8K of RAM and a 1200Bps modem for downloading games. The same year Coleco and AT&T also had plans for a service, but after getting a two-player version of Atari's *Star Raiders* working, they kept adding features until the system was too complex for existing technology. Eventually, they scrapped the idea.
Anything else? Well, suprisingly, there's a big gap between then and now. In '93, Baton Technologies tried to introduce a modem-based system called *TelePlay* for the NES, but it never shipped.



by Christian Svensson

Christian Svensson is the assistant editor and webmaster at Next Generation Online which can be found at http://www.next-generation.com/

Mplayer dramatically dropped fees and started a trend. What do these new rates mean for the future of online gaming?

At last September's Online Game Developer's Conference, a roundtable consisting of the heads of seven leading online gaming services was very fast to condemn 3DO's plans for a flat pricing structure for *Meridian 59*. Almost every panel member claimed that they couldn't fiscally maintain or expand the infrastructure necessary given the fixed revenue from a single subscriber. "There are only two proven revenue models: hourly and free," said Chris Holden of Kesmai. "It is naive to think that a company can maintain a large scale service at a fixed price point."

Since that time, we have seen the official launch of many online gaming services, and most have learned what consumers and the press have been telling them all along: A fair flat rate is the only way services will get subscribers. Hourly rates simply are unacceptable to consumers, given that many games take several hours. Player's don't want to be watching the clock when they are competing.

The other major hurdle these services have had to contend with has been the "free" mentality that has always been integral to the Internet. *Quake* servers, Subspace, MUDs, and dozens of other forms of free entertainment have always existed on the Net. The emergence of free services like Blizzard's Battle.net, Westwood's Chat, and other developer-provided offerings promised to offer additional significant competition to Mplayer, TEN, and other commercial services. When faced with the question of how these companies would deal with these competitors, online gaming companies quickly pointed out how they would offer better service and performance. But consumers didn't particularly care and happily took advantage of the free services that still functioned adequately.

Several companies have taken preliminary awkward steps since the launch of many of the services. Mplayer in particular has gotten off to a running start with the recent dramatic move of not only dropping its subscriber fees from $20/month to $30/year, but of providing many of its services for free. With that move, Mplayer's entire revenue model changed from a consumer model to an advertising model.

Brian Apgar of MPath may have foretold Mplayer's eventual plans at that same conference last September by saying, "Advertising in the form of 'sponsored play' is yet another potential form of revenue we are exploring. Imagine 'tonight's session is sponsored by Nike or Coke.' " The aforementioned "sponsored play" isn't so much on a night-by-night basis by a single sponsor, but is instead supported by banners and other advertising on Mplayer web pages and client interface. Paul Matteucci, Mplayer's president and CEO had this to say about the move: "We simply wanted to be able to offer free play for those games that can already be played for free."

So where did the decision come from? Back in December, Mplayer decided to investigate a model with significantly lower subscription fees for consumers. "We erased the whiteboards and started over. We decided that we could do it because we can leverage the best product and because we had an extremely low cost infrastructure," said Matteucci. By the time January rolled around, the company had narrowed the field to two alternatives. If it was to stay with a monthly model, the required rate seemed to be about $10/month in order to sustain the subscriber growth that it wanted.

But Mplayer also wanted to have a free area, so that it could better compete with the likes of Kali and other free gaming alternatives. The drawback to this plan was the realization that it would lose the average customer after about five months. "Wow. At $10, we were only going to get about $40 or $50 from these customers, and we would have to market to them every month to keep them," says Matteucci. "So we came up with the possibility of a yearly model so that we only had to market to subscribers once a year. The difference in cost savings is absolutely huge." Mplayer did some

further research upon what the proper yearly charge should be, and arrived at the $30 price point. By the beginning of February, the final decisions were being made, and announced about a week later.

So what does this all mean to you? Or to developers? Or to Mplayer's competitors? Will the new revenue model affect Mplayer's abilities to provide adequate service? The change begs a multitude of questions, many of whose answers are interrelated.

The big winners in this scenario are clearly the gamers. Paying less or nothing is obviously better than the monthly rates that were previously the norm. Logically, it will also enable access to far greater number of players than the prior higher cost monthly rates. More players means potentially better competition, a better community, and with luck a better playing experience. Furthermore, instead of playing games on free services, Mplayer will let gamers play many games (*Quake*, for example) for free enabling generally better performance than the uncertain latencies of the Internet. While Mplayer is hardly latency free, and performance still varies greatly from provider to provider, the interface tracks each player's server response and accepts or denies connections in an effort to provide a better play experience.

In the short period following the announcement, Mplayer has been swamped with users, and performance has suffered an ever so slight decline. When looking at the situation AOL has found itself in by drastically changing its price structure, it seems Mplayer may have placed itself in a similar situation. "When you look at AOL, it is acting as a POP provider more than anything else." says Kristin Asleson, Mplayer's vice president and general manager. "Mplayer doesn't act as a provider and relies upon people's existing connections. Secondly, for AOL to upgrade their mini-based system and network, it is looking at a potential expenditure of millions of dollars. For us to upgrade we just throw a few more pizza boxes [servers] along our backbone that cost us a few thousand dollars each. It's really a different system." It is understandable that Mplayer has been caught slightly off guard at the onset of its new direction, but consumers will be watching to make sure such infrastructure and performance improvements do happen in the coming weeks.

Developers should also take a good look at Mplayer's plans. Potential pros and cons go along with the revenue change. Asleson was fast to point out that that Mplayer has "had a number of developers who have seen a better than 20% improvement in retail sales just by being able to say that their product has free Internet play on the box. Many companies don't want to make the investment in their own setup so a free service like Mplayer can really help them out." In addition, developers whose games appear on Mplayer receive some percentage of Mplayer's revenue overall, so presumably any improvement for Mplayer benefits a developer. But the model is new, and it is likely to be some time before Mplayer has built the needed user base to sustain itself with it. Until then, developers signing on are likely to be a little unsure of their chances of drawing major revenue from the service.

Mplayer's online competition isn't likely to change their ways dramatically in the face of the price change, but the move certainly did much to shake up the industry. TEN's initial response to Mplayer's change was: "From our perspective, this shows that Mplayer has given up as far as offering a premium service is concerned. They are scrambling for a new business model." Matteucci countered, "TEN has taken the HBO model. It worked for HBO and is likely to work for them. We think of ourselves as more of an ABC model. There is room in the market for a lot of different models."

Just prior to Mplayer's change, Engage Games Online announced its new hourly pricing model. With regard to Engage's move, Matteucci said, "Following with the TV station analogy, Engage would be the 'Pay-Per-View' option. For online-only content, there's definitely room in the market for such a model. There's also the issue of having a compelling game that everyone has to play that isn't free anywhere else; you can get fair value for that game." In the case of Engage, it has *WarCraft II* and probably the forthcoming *Bomberman* title from Interplay (Cover story NG 27) that are likely to be major draws for its service regardless of price.

In the short time that the new pricing model has been in place, Mplayer has seen a quadrupling in the number of player hours on the service. While the majority of players on the service are happy about the influx of "fresh meat," some old timers have grumbled a bit about how crowded it has become. "I'm a Giants season ticket holder and I used to love it when only 2,000 people used to show up for the game, but they were going to leave town if that kept up. A similar situation holds for us." Matteucci says.

All in all, the risk that Mplayer has taken is likely to prove beneficial for the industry. It tends to prove that consumers don't have to fork over mountains of cash for a premium service, which is an important finding given the current number of companies who are unable to find profit on the Net in any form. If the model remains viable over a period of time, other companies will most certainly follow suit making online gaming even more accessible to the mainstream. It could well be the start of a golden age for the fledgling industry.

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Data stream

Amount of PlayStations sold in Europe as of December 31, 1996: **2.2 million**
Amount sold in the U.K.: **700,000**
European software sales: **11 million units**
According to *The Guardian*, British Telephone profits per second: **£105**
Number of Internet users in the U.K.: **600,000**
Amount of phone calls made from the U.K. on Christmas day, 1996: **60 million**
Spice Girls albums sold in the U.K. by the end of 1996: **1.7 million**
According to www.microsoft.com, Microsoft's 1995 R&D expenditure: **$860 million**
Average age of Microsoft employees: **34.3 years**
Number of Microsoft employees worldwide: **20,561**
Number of people worldwide who use Microsoft office products: **55 million**
According to the latest TRST figures, the number of 3DO units sold per month in North America in the run up to Christmas 1996: **5,000**
U.S. sales of the Jaguar, per month, in late Summer: **100**
Amount of Jaguars sold in December 1996: **1,000**
According to SGI, the amount of cigarettes that the latest tobacco-handling machinery can produce in a minute: **12,000**
According to a survey by Nytol, the amount of men who suffer sleepless nights due to worries about their sex lives: **42%**

Arcadia

All the latest arcade and coin-op news

by **Marcus Webb**

Marcus Webb is the editor-in-chief of *RePlay* magazine, the leading U.S. trade amusement magazine



Street Fighter 3 **Arrives**





First it was chic for rock stars to have one name (Prince, Sting, Madonna). Then it became hot for movies to be known by alpha-numeric nicknames instead of full titles (*Terminator 2* became *T2*; *Independence Day* became *ID4*). Now Capcom Coin-Op is latching onto the trend. It has finally launched the long-awaited *Street Fighter 3*, but its official name is *Three: A New Generation of Street Fighters*. Or just plain *Three* for short.

The game had its U.S. debut at a mid-March tradeshow. Over two years in development, *Three* brings a cast of nearly all new characters, a new graphics style, and a revamped fighting system. Perennial favorites Ken and Ryu return from *SF2*, while all other characters are new — including the central hero, Alex, who's described as "a tough New Yorker who fights to avenge his defeated martial arts instructor." Other new characters range from a Russian "cyber punk" to a teenage female Japanese Ninja. Players will use the same basic offensive moves and styles familiar from past *Street Fighter* games plus a new category of moves called "parrying," a range of aggressive blocking acts that enable deflection of oncoming attacks. Players can choose a character and one of three different Super Art moves (formerly known as Super Combos), and the game begins.

Three runs on Capcom's new 32-bit video platform, CPS-III, which uses a CD-ROM drive with 776Mbits RAM. The factory says this computer horsepower has enabled designers to reach new heights of fluid animation within a 2D animation framework. Up to 64 colors per animated sprite and 36,000 colors for each background are on the screen. Compared to previous *Street Fighter* entries, more than four times the number of animation frames depict key moves, resulting in far smoother graphics.

Atari's **Maximum Force**

Fans of Atari's long-running arcade hit *Area 51* who love shooting games with targets, secret rooms, gorgeous graphics, and fast-paced action should be equally trigger-happy about Atari's new *Maximum Force*, a dedicated game for one or two players simultaneously. Now appearing in arcades, it boasts enhanced color bit-depth and improved graphic compression. Action is faster than in Atari's prior shooting hit, *Area 51*, with even more shootable objects in each scene.



Secret rooms took *Area 51* into stratospheric heights of popularity and are all over the place in this one. Atari is promising 30 hidden stages that can only be reached by shooting a secret combination of elements across various scenes.

Detailed graphics use a combination of pre-rendered, textured scenes populated with live action sequences of villains and good guys. According to Atari engineers: "Even though each scene is originally composed of millions of polygons, images are stored on a hard drive and played back much like a movie, leading to rich scenes and fast-paced play different from any other game."

The storyline involves three groups of oddball terrorists who are out to unleash their own brand of chaos on the world. The player's goal: stop them at all costs. Action occurs in exotic locales from New York City to Easter Island and a steaming South American jungle. Along the way, players take rides on hydrosleds, helicopters, all-terrain vehicles, and elevators — to name just a few of the wacky modes of transportation.

Sega's First **"Model 3" Driver**

The latest technology platform for Sega coin-op, Model 3, got its debut last fall with the stunning *Virtua Fighter 3*. Now Sega is applying its Model 3 board to a driving game and — surprise — it's not *Daytona 2*, as many had expected. The new title is *Super GT* (see **NG 28**). With up to 1 million polygons per second (more than triple the number the Model 2 platform gave *Daytona*), the texture-mapped graphics on *Super GT* have achieved a level of realism that is truly "cinematic."

This is a deluxe sit-down unit with all the extras. Players choose from four different cars, each depicted with lifelike handling characteristics that the real vehicle has on real roads: a Porsche, a Mclaren F1, a Ferrari F40, or Dodge Viper. The four-speed stickshift comes with some fancy programming to let skilled players pull out of spins and adroitly reenter in the race with no loss of speed. Sega's patented "cradle system" motion base provides forced feedback so gamers can feel vibrations trembling through their hands and bodies as the game simulates the counterpull of gravity while whipping around curves and can sense screeching tires trying to get a grip on pavement.

Early reviews in Asia and Europe won big applause (even from some of Sega's strongest rivals). By the way, if you're wondering what happened to Sega's driver *Scud Car*, this is it — U.S. marketers convinced Sega's Japanese HQ to change the title to *Super GT*, since in English the word "Scud" calls up memories of Scud Missiles, the Gulf War, and Saddam Hussein. At any rate, *Super GT* tested earlier this year at the Sega City arcade in Irvine, Calif., where it was reportedly the top attraction. *Super GT* should be appearing in better arcades now, so put on your crash helmet and those Italian racing gloves — you've got a heck of a ride ahead!

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Yesterday, you were a cocky 2-D arcade shooter.

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breaking

Movers & Shakers

The business news that affects the games you play

by Colin Campbell

Colin Campbell is the editor of *Next Generation Online* which can be found at http://www.next-generation.com/



FINAL FANTASY MANIA

NEWSLINE: Sony's unwieldy attempts to control the hysteria surrounding *Final Fantasy VII* caused it a devilish conundrum, especially on the sticky subject of censorship. The company publicly stated that it would have to take a decision on whether or not to cut a scene which takes place in a brothel and includes salacious content. Naturally, this provoked outrage of the kind only RPG fans can muster. Sony was soon peeking out from beneath a pile of long letters, Internet petitions, and interpretations of the First Amendment.

BOTTOMLINE: Sony of America is fanatical about what it fancifully sees as its cool "image" and so sought to downplay the controversy. It pointed out that no actual decision had been made, but could not deny that a change had been proposed. Square sorted the whole mess out by stating that it would never allow Sony to tamper, localize, censor, or muck around with its creation.

APOGEE FUMING

NEWSLINE: Apogee responded furiously to Activision's bold claim that its recently signed development team Hipnotic had previously been at the core of the original *Duke Nukem* creative crew. Apogee said the claim was "an outright lie" pointing out that only five people left Apogee to form Hipnotic, two of whom did little more than lay out the game's manual.

BOTTOMLINE: The last word goes to George Broussard, executive producer of *Duke* at Apogee: "It's a crime against the real developers of *Duke* to see others claiming they were responsible for its success. The core developers for *Duke* are still here and hard at work."

SONY'S PRICING SECRET

NEWSLINE: Distribution sources contacted *Next Generation Online* with reports that Sony was selling its games to the trade at lower than normal prices. *Shoot Out '97*, generally regarded as a AAA product, was being offered to distributors at $32 instead of the standard $39.

BOTTOMLINE: Sony is planning to drop software prices. It has recognized that a key weapon in its war against Nintendo will be cheaper games. Also, its user base has reached a critical mass where software prices at less than $40 are now conceivable and desirable.

SPELLING TO DUMP VIRGIN

NEWSLINE: Virgin Interactive owner Spelling said it is planning to sell its interest in the company.

BOTTOMLINE: The entertainment giant says Virgin's financial performance has been disappointing, despite high profile hits such as *Red Alert*. It will shed its 90% interest via a public stock offering later this year. One criticism was Virgin's inability to create great games in-house despite the launching of creative unit Burst.

SQUARE LOOKS TO ARCADES?

NEWSLINE: There was much speculation in the press that Namco and Square were talking about an arcade-machine joint venture. Namco was reported to be impressed with Square's recently proven ability to expand out of its RPG homeland. The success of *Tobal No. 1* is an obvious example.

BOTTOMLINE: All very well. Except that *Tobal No. 1* was by no means a mega-hit. And a few driving and snow-boarding action scenes within *FFVII* are hardly going to worry the likes of Capcom, Konami, and Sega. Then there was news that *Final Fantasy VII* sales in Japan have not lived up to expectations thus cramping Square's much vaunted expansion.

PIRATES HUMBLED

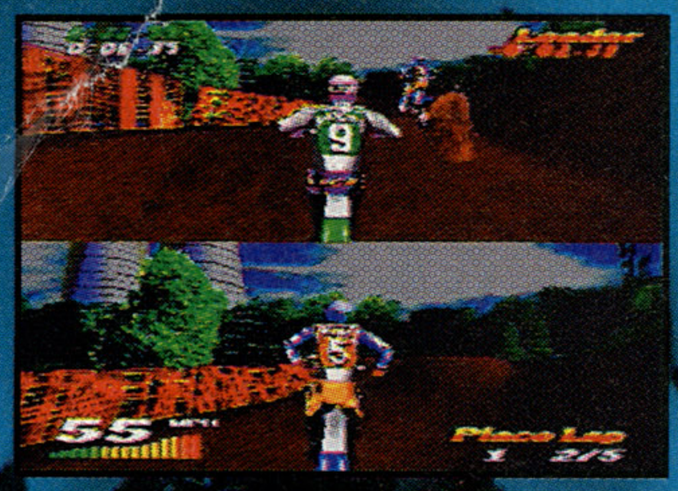
NEWSLINE: Miscreant computer dealers in Singapore were made to suffer the modern equivalent of an afternoon in the village stocks, after outraging Microsoft.

BOTTOMLINE: After being nabbed by Microsoft for bundling the company's software on its machines for free, the humbled dealers were forced to take a full page ad out in the Singapore press apologizing for their pernicious piratical behavior. Meanwhile, piracy now costs U.S. console and computer game publishers $2.6 billion a year according to trade body IDSA.

Increasingly, the issue of piracy is on more and more game companies' agendas — especially as the influx of illegal copying devices into the U.S. continues to gain momentum. ng

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AGES 6+

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GADGET

Peripherals, accessories, gizmos, add-ons, thingies, and stuff

Falcon Mach V

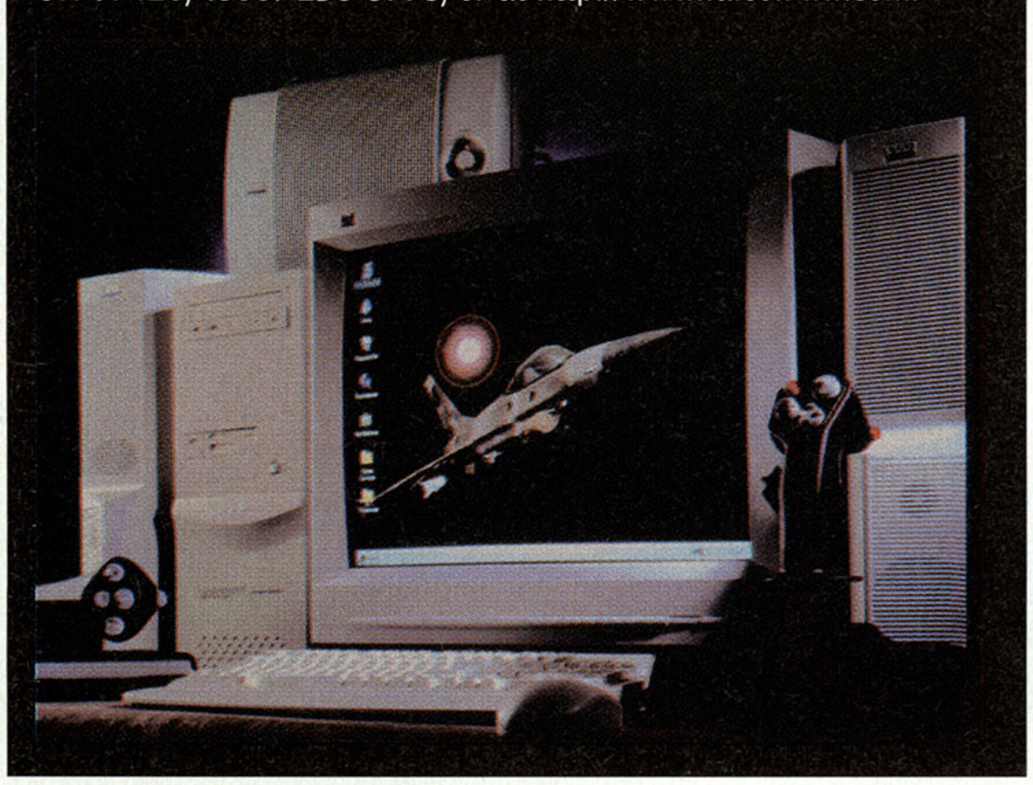
Format: PC
Manufacturer: Falcon Northwest
Price: $5,495

Next Generation profiled a Falcon Mach V several months ago (**NG 20**), which was nothing short of excellent. In the interim, the folks at Falcon have been busy putting together the next wave of MMX-based, high-end PCs — and this one's a screamer.

The unit we were sent contained a Pentium 200Mhz MMX CPU, 32MB EDO RAM, 4.5GB Quantum Atlas Ultra Wide SCSI-3 hard drive running off an Adaptec 2940uw SCSI adapter, Diamond Stealth 3D 2000 4MB SVGA adapter with Diamond Monster 3D 3D accelerator (based on the 3Dfx Voodoo chipset, very nice), creative Sound Blaster 16 with a Yamaha WaveForce XG MIDI/Wavetable board, US Robotics 33.6Kbps modem, CH Products Gamecard 3, and a Princeton Graphics E017 17" monitor. Also included were a set of Altec Lansing ACS55 speakers with powered subwoofer, and CH products F-16 Fighterstick, Pro Throttle, and GamePad.

To say the system is top of the line is an understatement. No other P200 system we had available for comparison even came close to the benchmarks set by the Mach V, although it is worth mentioning that at press time, none of the machines we put it up against had MMX CPUs, so this may be a case of comparing apples and oranges. However, the Mach V is so self-consciously aimed at power users, even the unit installed to keep the CPU cool is a dual-fan, active refrigeration unit using a Peltier cooling wafer (a semiconducting sliver of silicon that gets cold when current is pumped through it — geez).

The case is a snap to open and all the components are easy to reach if need be. Falcon even backs up its products with Falcon Overnight, a service plan in which, if a problem can't be fixed through a call to tech support, Falcon will cough up the expense of having Federal Express pick up the computer and ship it back repaired. While the systems are pricey (an IDE-based version with a 4GB hard drive is available for $4,395), Falcon will build to suit anyone's needs. Falcon can be reached at Falcon Northwest Computer Systems, 263 South Bayshore Dr., Coos Bay, OR 97420, (800) 258-6778, or at http://www.falcon-nw.com.



Datebook

April

The Computer Game Developer's Conference will take place April 25 to 29, and the Expo will be April 27 to April 29. The Writers Guild of America West, Computer Game Artists, Interactive Audio Special Interest Group (IA-SIG), and sigTest (game industry testing professionals) will all sponsor related events at the CGDC. Check out http://www.cgdc.com or call (415) 356-3406.

Microsoft's DirectX Game Developer's Seminar is on April 30 in Santa Clara. Learn about designing games with DirectX 5. Visit www.microsoft.com/mediadev for more info.

May

Multimedia 97 Exposition and Forum will take place May 6 to 9 at the Metropolitan Toronto Convention Center, Toronto, Canada. The show features five major components: Multimedia Communications, Virtual Reality World, VICOM, Showcase On Production, and Electronic Design. For more information, call (905) 660-2491, fax (905) 660-2492, or e-mail moreinfo@multimedia.ca. Visit the official web site at http://multimedia.magic.ca to get show details.

From May 17 to 20, the **AAMA/AMOA 1997** Washington Conference will take place at the Loews L'Enfant Plaza Hotel in Washington, D.C. AAMA is American Amusement Machine Association. AMOA is Amusement and Music Operators Association. For more information, call the AAMA at (847) 290-9088.

June

The one and only **Electronic Entertainment Exposition** (aka **E3**) doesn't take place in Los Angeles but in Atlanta on June 19 through June 21, 1997. It will be held in the Georgia World Congress Center and the Georgia Dome. Visit http://www.mha.com/e3/ for more information on this year's E3.

The Spring **CES** (Consumer Electronics Show) will be held June 2 to 5 in Atlanta, Georgia. Send e-mail to cesinfo@eia.org.

The **Spring Comdex** will be held June 2 to 5 in Atlanta, Georgia. It promises to be a busy week in Atlanta. Bill Gates is one of the keynote speakers at this Comdex, so you better sign up early. Check out http://www.comdex.com to get more details.

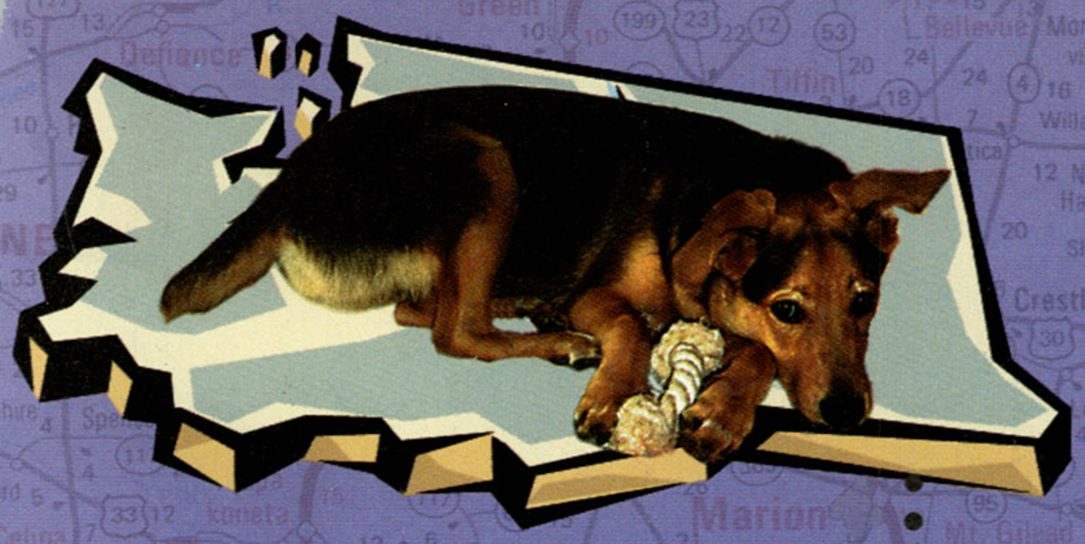
July

The **Comdex Internet Show** will be at the Moscone Center in San Francisco from July 21 through July 25.

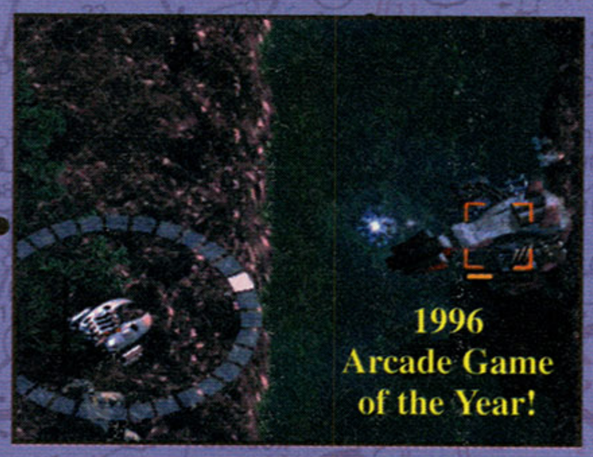
September

Seybold San Francisco: Seybold's Conference is from Sept 29 to October 3. Seybold Exposition will take place from October 1 to 3. For more info, visit Seybold at http://www.seyboldseminars.com/

SHOW ORGANIZERS: If your show isn't listed here it's because we simply don't know about it. But we'd really like to know about it. Please fax us at (415) 468-4686; e-mail us at ngonline@imagine-inc.com; or write us at DateBook, **Next Generation**, 150 North Hill Drive, Brisbane, CA 94005.



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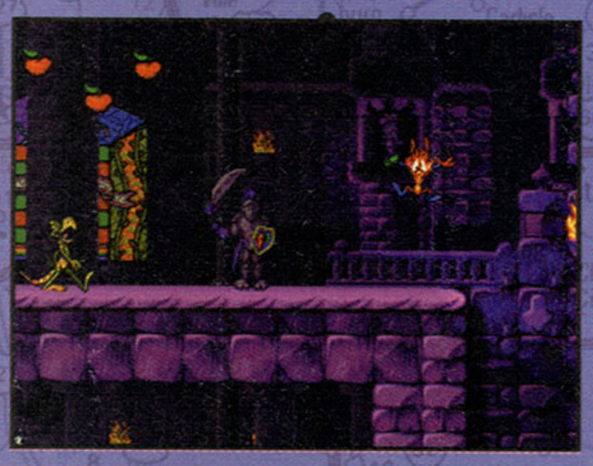
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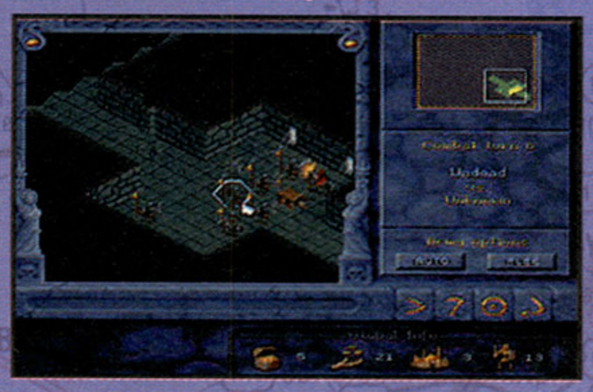
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AGE OF WONDERS

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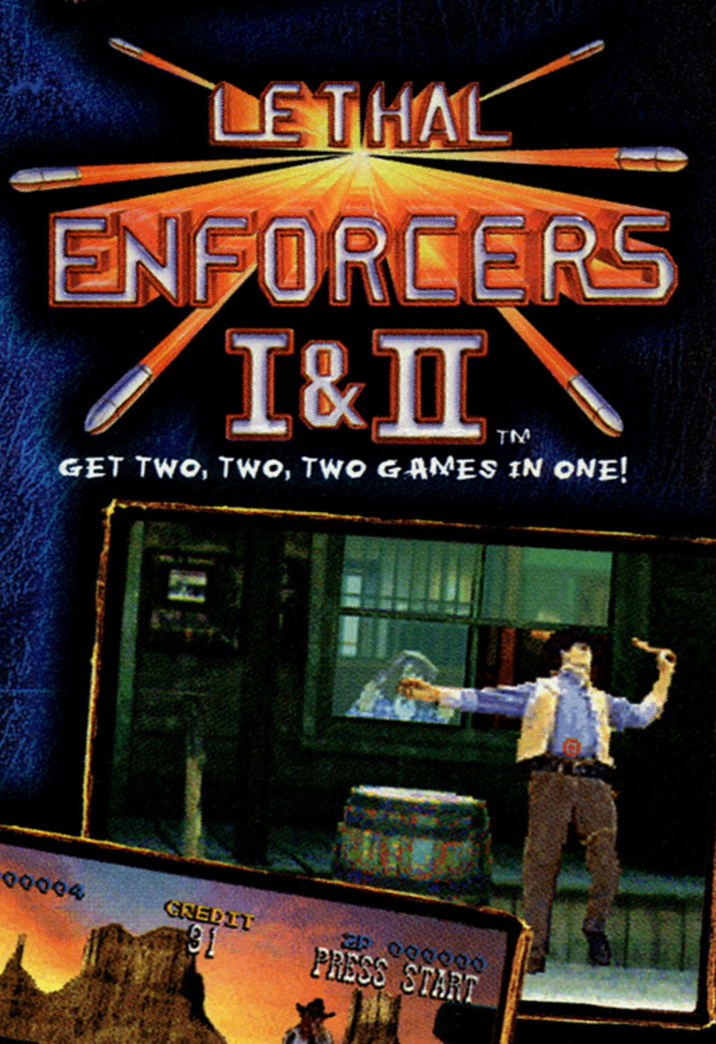
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Is Nintendo 64 Breaking Up?



Nintendo promised "quality not quantity" for N64 software. But the handful of mediocre games released so far honor only half this deal. So can Nintendo's 1997 lineup get its 64-bit wonder console back on track? A **Next Gen** report:

On **NG 20** Howard Lincoln proclaimed, "I don't care if we have as many games as Sony and Sega. What I care about is whether the games are any good or not." Once again, he was articulating Nintendo's strategy — and promise to gamers — of "quality not quantity" when it comes to the business of releasing Nintendo 64 games.

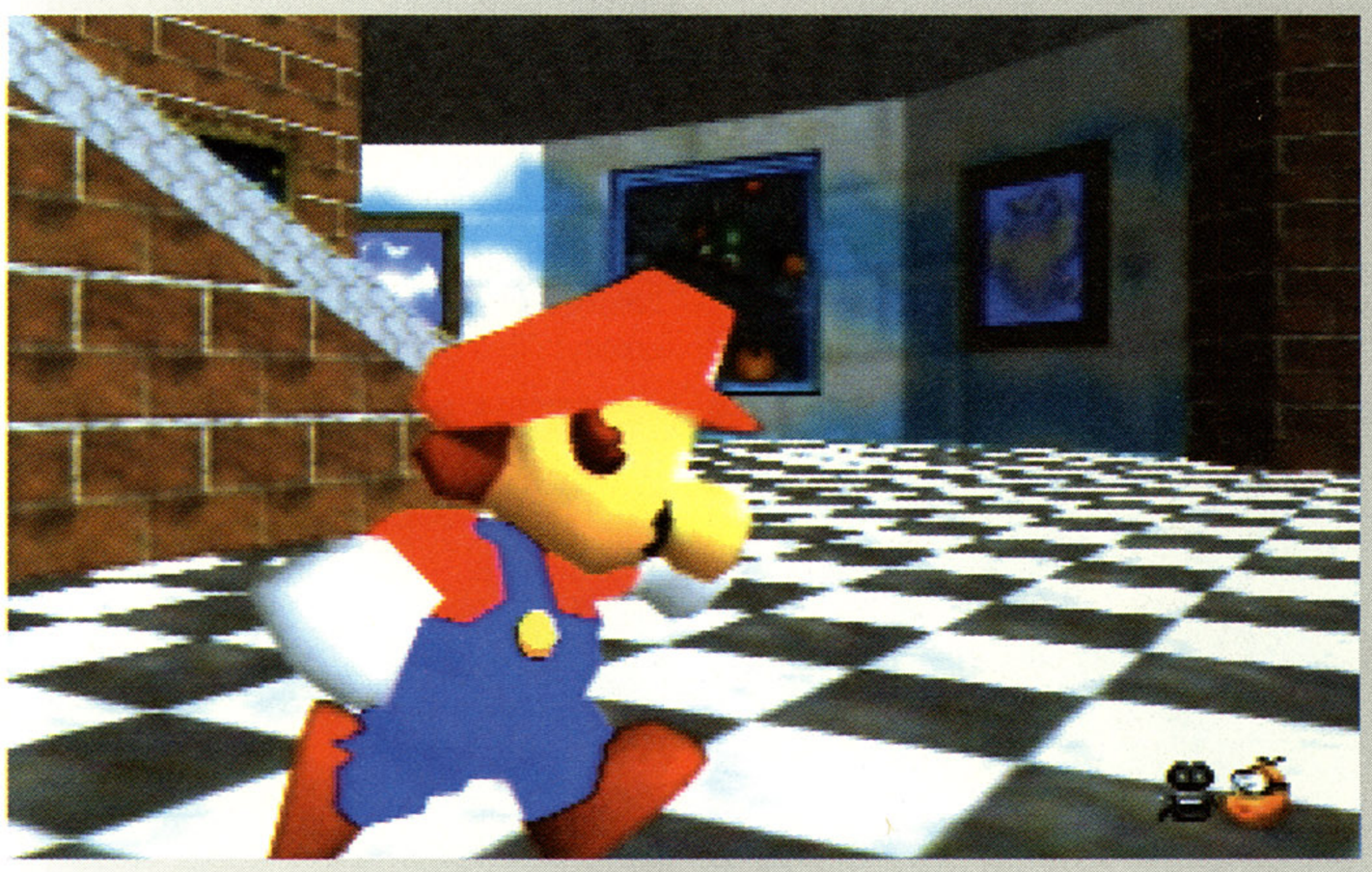
But have the titles lived up to this promise? The answer is "yes" when considering the two first-party titles like *Super Mario 64* and *Wave Race 64*, but a resounding "no" in almost every other instance. Nintendo 64 is great hardware that easily accommodates AAA titles in the right hands — *Mario 64* proves this. So consumers should be asking when the rest of the AAA titles are due to arrive. For that matter, how about the AA and A titles?

To date, Nintendo 64 has delivered only two "five-star" games and is averaging three stars in **Next Generation**'s "Finals" section. In fact, beyond *PilotWings 64*, a second-party game given special attention from Nintendo throughout, not a single game made outside of NCL has managed to break the three-star threshold.

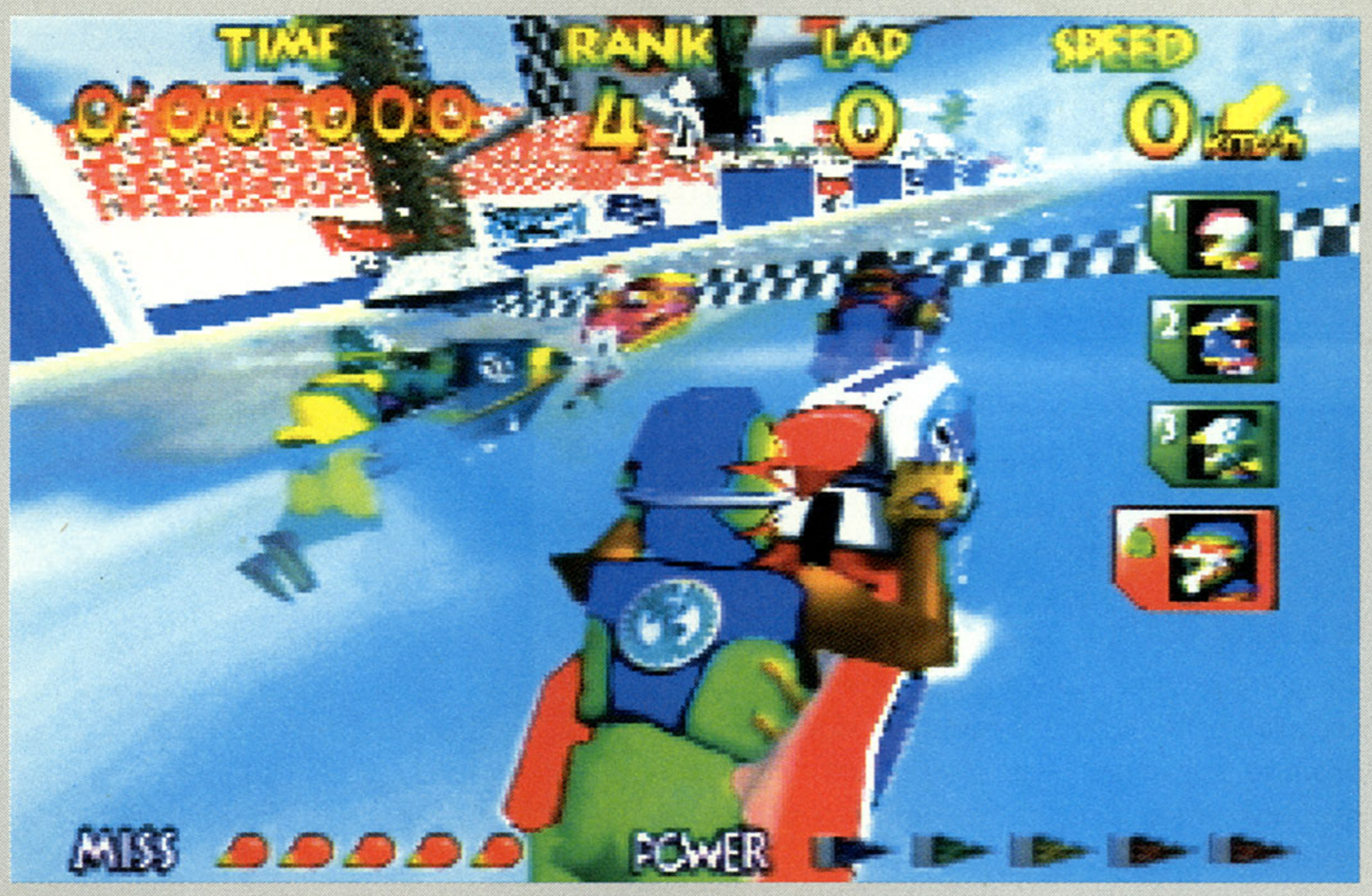


Despite the lacking quality of N64 software, NCL President Hiroshi Yamauchi recently had some harsh criticisms of his competition. See page 49

Certainly, not all the games are bad. But classics are decidedly thin on the ground, and the overall library is a far, far cry from the "everyone's a winner" dream promised at Nintendo 64's launch. And this is why we are taking a stance that many will see as aggressive toward Nintendo. It's not that we're not believers in the company and in the hardware — we are. But the games



An early and impressive demonstration of what Nintendo 64 could deliver, *Super Mario 64* now highlights the disparity in quality of AAA Miyamoto games and the rest of the Nintendo 64 lineup



***WaveRace 64*, an ambitious racing game from master designer Shigeru Miyamoto, is the only other undeniable AAA title to grace Nintendo 64**

simply aren't up to scratch, and someone has to tell them.

The dream of depending on one gaming system to meet all your gaming needs without fear of disappointment is the romantic ideal of the industry. Though some companies, most notably Nintendo, have approached this ideal, none has achieved it. Yet it was with a campaign to deliver this mythical level of quality — with *Mario 64* blazing a trail — that won Nintendo 64 the position of best-selling, next-generation console during the holiday season of '96. But now over 1.5 million gamers bought into this promise and are now left holding the same proverbial "three-star" bag easily found on competing systems. Nor do they have the benefit of an enormous software library filled with solid, if not great, games to fall back on.

Speaking of the software libraries for Sega Saturn and PlayStation, Shigeru Miyamoto suggested in **NG 14** that, "much of the software looks poor and many of these games seem experimental." Even more recently, NCL's [Nintendo Corporate Ltd] outspoken President, Hiroshi Yamauchi boldly suggested that the rapidly increasing PlayStation library has mostly "silly and boring" software titles. Maybe so, but outside of a few first-party titles (the ones Miyamoto worked on himself), the same could now be said of the significantly smaller Nintendo 64 library.

Did Nintendo ever really believe it could deliver on its promise of never-before-seen levels of consistent software quality?

In the end, every successful videogame console throughout history finds itself weighed down by a giant library of marginal to average quality games. But Nintendo 64 was meant to be different. So what happened?

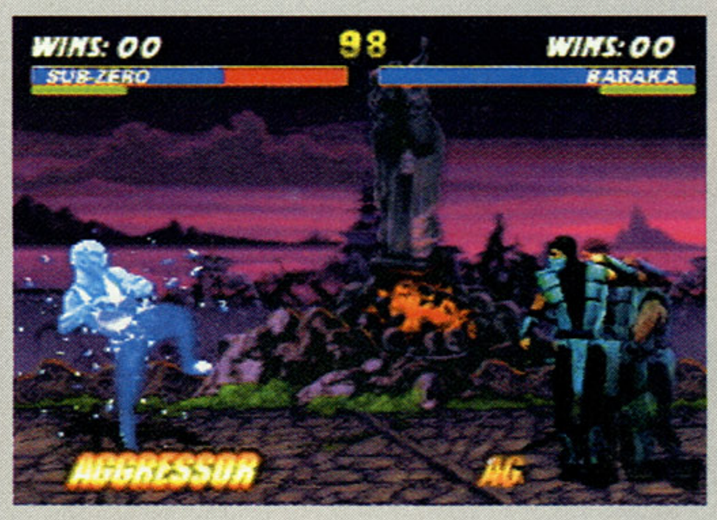
Did Nintendo ever really believe it could deliver on its promise of never-before-seen levels of consistent software quality? To a certain degree, it's impossible to believe otherwise. No videogame company has ever taken a beating from the press the way Nintendo did when Nintendo 64's launch date slipped month after month, and yet the company stuck to its guns and said that despite the hardware being ready, the quality of the software wasn't quite there yet. Ask yourself this question: Would *Super Mario 64* still have been a great game had it come out a few months earlier? By traditional standards, yes, it probably would. But nevertheless, Nintendo insisted that simply "great" wasn't good enough and that it should be groundbreaking. The announcement that the hardware launch was delayed again both heart-breaking and yet music to gamers' (and game journalists') ears: Nintendo was sticking to its promise.

Even after launch, Nintendo delayed guaranteed crowd-pleasers such as *WaveRace 64* and *Super Mario Kart 64* until they were right. And so Nintendo itself has basically delivered.

But, of course, this is only part of the story. As difficult as it's been for Nintendo to deliver quality first-party (Nintendo homegrown) titles, it has enjoyed even less success in maintaining the quality of third-party titles.

So why have third-party publishers had so much difficulty getting to grips with the system? Certainly many have been scared off by Nintendo 64's cartridges (at roughly $35, they're far more expensive than the $15 or so Sega and Sony charge for discs, and besides — developers have got used to the space offered by CDs). And certainly, up until Nintendo 64 proved itself in the marketplace, many third-party software publishers will have taken a "wait and see" attitude before committing to expensive multimillion dollar N64 game development.

But there seems to be more to the problem than just this. And a few people that **Next Generation** talked to have indicated that maybe Nintendo isn't sharing all of its game-making know-how with all its third parties. Certainly, it's important to remember that hardware manufacturers such as Nintendo make more money on games they make themselves than on games made by other people. Therefore, it makes sense for a hardware manufacturer to ensure that its people know how to





It's difficult to take seriously the claims that the N64 lineup is based solely on quality when faced with such meaningless products as *MK Trilogy* and *Killer Instinct Gold*

make games better than anyone else.

However, no videogame system has ever been able to thrive without support from the entire game industry (just ask a Jaguar or 3DO owner) and when a system's library becomes unbalanced by too many first-party titles, quality inevitably suffers. While it's great for Nintendo to sell huge numbers of games it does well (such as *Super Mario 64*), gamers should also be able to count on third parties to fill out the genres in which the first party is weak (with say, Capcom 2D fighting games and EA sports games). And thus far, there has been very little to get excited about in these essential genres even with Nintendo's careful supervision.

To control the quality of third-party development, Nintendo made the decision (as PR-motivated as it may have been) to establish what it dubbed the Nintendo 64 "Dream Team," an elite group of developers and publishers that would work under the wing of Nintendo to deliver unique titles that demonstrate the system's strengths. Looking closely at the choice of Dream Team members, however, raises some serious questions as to Nintendo's motivations for choosing members.

While Nintendo may insist that game quality is priority one, the inclusion of such companies as Williams, GameTek, and Acclaim on the Dream Team would suggest that sales potential is the real emphasis. Let's face it, no one could argue that yet another version of *Mortal Kombat* or a generic movie license-based game screams



The man behind the only truly great Nintendo 64 titles, Shigeru Miyamoto remains the only good reason to buy a Nintendo 64

marketable B and C titles.

If Nintendo has a chance to deliver games of significantly higher quality than its competitors, then that chance is named Shigeru Miyamoto. The brains behind all things good Nintendo, Miyamoto is the smiling, sociable genius who made marketing Nintendo 64 easy and continues to deliver games that far exceed the quality status quo. But there are limits to how much one man can do and there's an inherent danger in relying so heavily on one person for the entire creative output of a company. Sega may promote Yu Suzuki as its coin-op guru, but with four AM divisions fighting it out for superiority, it's far from a one-person show.

Nintendo is not in a bad position for finding future mass-market success: *Mario 64* and *WaveRace* will continue to draw the crowds. But already

Games such as *Shadows of the Empire*, *Killer Instinct Gold*, *NBA Hangtime*, and *Doom 64* are little more than marketable B and C titles

quality — but they sure do sell well.

For sure, there's nothing necessarily wrong with offering such games on Nintendo 64. In fact, if a game generates interest in the system and satisfies consumers, then Nintendo is right to make it available. However, in the end, games such as *Shadows of the Empire*, *Killer Instinct Gold*, *NBA Hangtime*, *Doom 64*, and *Wayne Gretzky Hockey* are little more than highly

we are hearing from more and more gamers demanding to know "what's next?" And the sad truth is that, for now at least, we have to reply that we simply don't know.

Nintendo could probably make N64 a success by simply churning out the same old games that we've all played a hundred times before. But it would be a shame to break its initial promise, and a shame that so much potential was wasted. ng









Though Hiroshi Yamauchi would have you believe otherwise, 32-bit titles such as *Resident Evil 2*, *Final Fantasy VII*, *WorldWide Soccer*, and *Fighters Megamix* are far better than most N64 titles

What's Wrong With N64 Software?

So why do we have such a problem with N64's games so far? There are five main reasons...

The quality of an individual game depends on many factors particular to that game. But looking down the N64 lineup, it's possible to identify five recurring problems.

1. Out of date

In a fast-moving industry driven by a perennial impatience for the next big thing, a game company cannot afford to be behind the times. Sega learned this lesson the hard way when Saturn launched with dated titles such as the original *Virtua Fighter* and *ClockWork Knight* against PlayStation's flashier *Battle Arena Toshinden* and *Warhawk*.

Now, after numerous delays in getting to market, Nintendo 64 finds itself in a similar position with a library of games that screams yesterday's news. Despite the system's amazingly positive launch, **NG** has heard from many Nintendo 64 gamers who are beginning to question the wisdom of their choice. *Mortal Kombat Trilogy*, *Cruis'n USA*, *NBA Hang Time*, and *Killer Instinct Gold* are all yesterday's coin-ops, while most western gamers graduated from *Doom* years ago.

Of course, Nintendo we're not suggesting that Nintendo should stick solely to the mainstream. Indeed, one of the most exciting things about the videogame powerhouse has always been its ability to operate just beyond the norm. In the face of more obviously marketable games for Sega Genesis, for example, Nintendo found enormous success with cute and cuddly games such as *Donkey Kong Country* and *Yoshi's Island*. But how many gamers in 1997 would have preferred the *Mario* game engine if it featured a bazooka-toting madman and blood dripping from the walls? Unfortunately, probably most of them.

At the same time, Nintendo has so far denied consumers the opportunity to play games in today's most popular genres. Since the decline of Super NES and the arrival of Nintendo 64, more and more gamers have turned to RPGs, 3D fighting games, and sports sims. But you'd think that no one at Nintendo had noticed.





How many gamers would have preferred *Mario* with a bazooka-toting madman and blood dripping from the walls? Unfortunately, probably most



When compared to contemporary titles such as Namco's *Soul Blade* for PlayStation, Nintendo 64 games such as *Killer Instinct Gold* and *Cruis'n USA* seem as though they're from a different era entirely

And considering the titles in development, there seems little hope that these voids will be filled anytime soon — if ever.

2. Too safe

The vast majority of Nintendo 64 games to date is made up of either coin-op or PC conversions, sequels to previous Nintendo hits, or — in cases like *Shadows of the Empire* — no-brainer adaptations of no-brainer licenses. Where are the risks? Where are brave new genres? Where are the never-seen-anything-like-it-before titles such as *PilotWings* and *F-Zero* that accompanied the launch of Super NES?

Sure, initially one of the most exciting aspects of Nintendo 64's future was the promise of 64-bit updates of its classic 8- and 16-bit franchises. But a system cannot live on sequels alone. Yes, *Super Mario 64* set a new standard in platform-style gaming, but how unexpected are *PilotWings 64*, *Mario Kart 64*, or *Star Fox 64*? In many cases, once the effect of the





Reviving successful series in 64-bit seems to be Nintendo's answer to the call for innovation



3D graphics (an effect which is lessened with each new update) has gone away, Nintendo 64 gamers are left playing essentially the same games they played on Super NES and even NES.

It would be nice to think that with superstar talent like Shigeru Miyamoto, Nintendo will once again be the company responsible for creating new gaming paradigms, especially considering the new technical freedoms enabled by Nintendo 64. In the gaming industry's infancy, gamers looked to Nintendo to tell them what videogaming was all about. From the lessons offered by Nintendo lately, new pupils could be forgiven for thinking that videogaming is about doing the same things over and over again but with better graphics.

3. Cartridges

The frustration felt by game developers and publishers over Nintendo's choice to go with a cartridge-based machine in the age of the CD-ROM has been well documented. And although Nintendo insisted otherwise, and even managed to lull the masses into a false sense of security with great-looking games such as

Nintendo 64 gamers are left playing what are essentially the same games they played on Super NES or even NES

Super Mario 64 and *WaveRace 64*, the concerns over a cartridge-based machine in the age of advanced 3D gaming are obviously well founded. To date, the problems have manifested themselves in the form of limited texture capacity (as in *Shadows of the Empire* where navigating the maze of hallways is made difficult not by challenging level design, but because of the





In comparing titles such as Psygnosis's *Wipeout XL* and Nintendo's *Mario Kart 64* it's clear that 64-bits does not constitute twice the power of 32-bit systems such as PlayStation

redundancy of monochromatic walls) or in the incessant and maddening looping of music in *Cruis'n USA*. There are many more less obvious, but nevertheless important, examples.

Not as crucial, but not to be discounted entirely, is N64's lack of ability to include FMV sequences in story-based games. FMV carries with it a well-deserved stigma because of several missteps in the application of video, but many recent CD-ROM games have managed to find a natural and satisfying place for FMV in their games. *Tomb Raider* uses FMV sequences as a reward for finishing a level and enhances the cinematic feel of the game. It would be difficult to argue that any Nintendo 64 game can offer the same rich production values. And aesthetics aside, is there anyone who would claim that the experience of playing *Shadows of the*

Empire would not have been enhanced immeasurably had LucasArts been able to incorporate a full CD version of John Williams's *Star Wars* musical score?

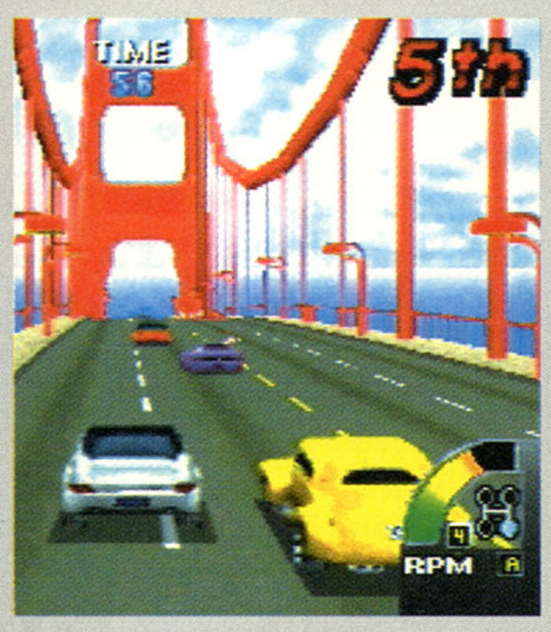
4. 64-bit vs 32-bit

Nintendo has been eager to stress the number "64" when referring to anything connected with its new system, even going so far as to make it part of the name. This is smart, given that those in the know are all too well aware of PlayStation and Saturn's 32-bit status. But as Atari proved when it urged gamers to "do the math," 64 in the world of videogaming is not automatically twice as fast/good/colorful as 32. And now much of Nintendo 64's software is proving it again.

It could just be that first-generation Nintendo 64 games are being compared to second- and third-generation PlayStation and Saturn games. Fair enough. But either way, Nintendo 64 was positioned as a generational leap beyond 32-bit — and yet the games seen so far would suggest less of a leap and more of a small hop. When *Super Mario 64* first turned up on our doorsteps, it was easy to believe that a system capable of handling 3D environments with such ease must represent the next generation of gaming platforms. Since then, however, Nintendo 64 has proven limited in certain key areas (most of them stemming from the cartridge format), and though it does many things extremely well, PlayStation or Saturn — two systems with large software libraries peppered with great games in almost every genre — does most of them nearly as well.

Looking at the current state of Nintendo 64 and its questionable software library, Nintendo will clearly have to make great strides with first-party games to re-convince everyone that its machine truly is a leap beyond its competitors. This will never be achieved by offering 32-bit quality games with anti-aliasing and no-cost Gouraud shading. If Nintendo is happy to simply be considered in the same breath as PlayStation and Saturn, it will have to do something very quickly to match the variety and quality of the other system's game libraries.





The cartridge format of Nintendo 64 has already shown its limits in the redundant texture palettes of *Shadows of the Empire* and the maddening looping of music in *Cruis'n USA*

5. No third-party support

Absent from Nintendo 64 games, across the board, is the kind of creative risk it takes to create an important game: the kind that creates a new genre or trend for the market to follow; the kind of risk Nintendo took in the early Super NES days with games such as *Actraiser* and *Populous*.

In place of such ambitious development standards is a philosophy that guarantees mediocrity, which it has delivered. Though it's still early in the lifespan of Nintendo 64, several games should be in the works from third parties that are at least willing to take a chance at being great. So far there is not very much to hope for. What's most disappointing about this phenomenon is that consumers are eager to see what Nintendo 64 can do, and third parties have only proven that they can do mediocre ports of mediocre games.

Numerous motivational factors explain why the third-party lineup thus far excels only in predictability. One reason is directly linked to the Nintendo 64 business model, which takes away a great deal of the profit potential for a third-party developer. Used to paying approximately $15 per disc for PlayStation, Saturn, and PC games, gamers pay about $35 for Nintendo 64 cartridges, and publishers must consider this carefully when planning games for the system.

"From an inventory risk standpoint, we prefer working on CD platforms," admits Virgin Games's Neil Young, which is part of the reason why Virgin is only developing one Nintendo 64 product as opposed to a number of games for competing CD-ROM systems. The bottom line is that when third parties have to pay Nintendo $35 upfront for all the games they want to make, it requires a huge financial gamble.

Many software publishers are still smarting from huge losses on unsold cartridge games at the end of the 16-bit era, and the last thing they want is to take another financial bath. So this means that no one wants to take any chances. Third parties will release only the safest, sure-fire winners for N64. And this (when cemented by Nintendo's demands for exclusivity which removes any profits from other versions) means tried-and-trusted no-brainer game recipes, big licenses, coin-op conversions — and a resounding "snore" from experienced gamers. ng

Nintendo will have to make great strides with first-party games to re-convince everyone that its machine is a leap beyond its competitors





While titles such as Sony's *Jumping Flash! 2* may not be blockbuster sellers, they possess a innovative quality sorely missing in Nintendo 64 titles such as *NBA Hangtime*

Then and **now**

A comparison with 1991's Super NES launch lineup reinforces the idea that N64's third parties are failing

Nintendo was eager to suggest that the early lineup of games for N64 was going to be something truly special, and first-party titles have more or less delivered, but what about third party? Do these titles even compare to Nintendo's early 16-bit days?

First Party

Super Mario World vs. Super Mario 64

Super Mario World — Offered more of everything in a 2D world and all at the highest quality level imaginable

Super Mario 64 — It recreates the platform genre in 3D for next-generation systems and in doing so gives game designers a new goal to aspire to





Super Mario World* for Super NES represented state of the art 2D gaming but did not offer the incredible innovation of *Super Mario 64

PilotWings vs. PilotWings 64

PilotWings — Introduced Mode 7-style 3D graphics into the home n a revolutionary gameplay model

PilotWings 64 — Offers nice new graphics and convincing 3D effects but very little by way of new gameplay dynamics





***PilotWings* for Super NES presented gamers with a brand new gameplay dynamic where the 64-bit version only supplies better graphics for the same formula**

F-Zero vs. WaveRace 64

F-Zero — Set a new standard in racing games for the home with dynamic graphics and 3D effects

WaveRace 64 — Does much of what *F-Zero* did for Super NES in establishing a new high-watermark for 3D racing games but represents less of a generational leap





Through the use of Mode 7 technology *F-Zero* introduced the home market to 3D racing but *WaveRace 64* made an equally impressive mark with incredible water physics

Third Party

Super NES

Actrasier — An unusual strategy/action game that showcased great sprite-based graphics and unique gameplay elements

Populous — An extremely important strategy game that helped give birth to the thinking man's game on console platforms

Gradius — Delivered to the home an accurate arcade experience for the first time ever

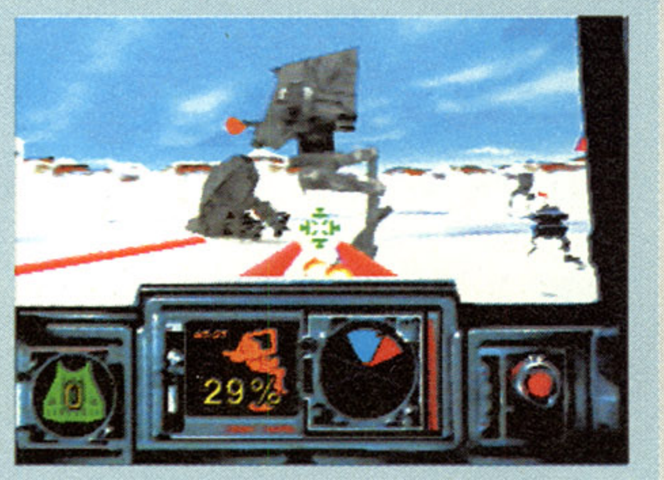
N64

Shadows of the Empire — A good-looking movie-licensed title of questionable quality

Mortal Kombat Trilogy — A game done just as well if not better on 16 and 32-bit platforms

Cruis'n USA - A bad port of an average arcade racing game





***Actraiser* from Enix explored creative new gameplay avenues while *Shadows of the Empire* is little more than a compilation of tried and true elements**

Future Memory

Can Nintendo's writable 64DD peripheral be the answer to N64's software dilemma? And even if it can, will gamers buy into it?



Back in May 1994, Nintendo announced that Nintendo 64 would be cartridge based and in doing so sent waves of shock and near bewilderment through the videogame industry. Until that point, CD-ROM had been more or less accepted as the future of videogaming (CDs being cheap to produce and capable of holding up to 650MB of data). To many, it seemed odd that Nintendo should fall back on the outmoded cartridge format.

A year later, though, the company unveiled its plans for the "Bulky Drive" peripheral — a proprietary storage system based around magneto-optical technology (which boasts faster access times than standard CDs and is writable). The device, which is scheduled for release at the end of 1997, has a 64MB capacity and is designed to sit beneath the Nintendo 64, connecting to it via a port in the console's base.

There are two main advantages to this unique system. Most obviously, it means that games can be released that require both cartridge and disc — a vital necessity for titles like *Legend of Zelda 64* which feature huge, fully explorable worlds that simply would not fit on a cartridge alone. Second, each Bulky Drive disc has 26 Megabits of writable space available, which enables users to store their own data and so paves the way for Nintendo to release customizable games. Recently, Shigeru Miyamoto talked about working on a disc version of *Mario Paint*, which is bound to use this facility. Plus, if 64DD incorporates a modem peripheral (as is rumored) this writable function will enable gamers to download new characters and stages, and customize their games.

Despite these benefits, however, the 64DD remains controversial — chiefly because dual-format machines have never been successful in the past. Sega CD and 32X platforms failed miserably, and even Nintendo's own disc-drive add-on for the 8-bit Famicom proved unsuccessful. With 64DD, there is a real chance Nintendo could end up diluting the N64 format. With half of N64s equipped with 64DD and half not, software inventory management becomes more of a problem, not less.

Even if the drive does take off, it will only offer game producers an additional 64MB — a paltry figure when compared to CD storage of 650MB. And in any case, Nintendo 64 cartridges themselves will soon be capable of holding 16MB.

In the end, though, the 64DD does have the one key asset which every new piece of videogame hardware needs: a killer app. If *Legend of Zelda 64* turns out to be as impressive as early screenshots suggest, fans of the NES and Super NES titles will find it hard to resist buying Nintendo's new peripheral, let alone those who have been lured into the videogames scene in more recent times.

And then there's Miyamoto's latest project — "self-growing games" that take advantage of the writable aspect of 64DD discs. Details are scarce, but if the old master is on the verge of creating a brilliant new game genre and the next generation of interactive entertainment, users will need to purchase 64DD in order to experience it. And what kind of Nintendo fan would miss out on that?

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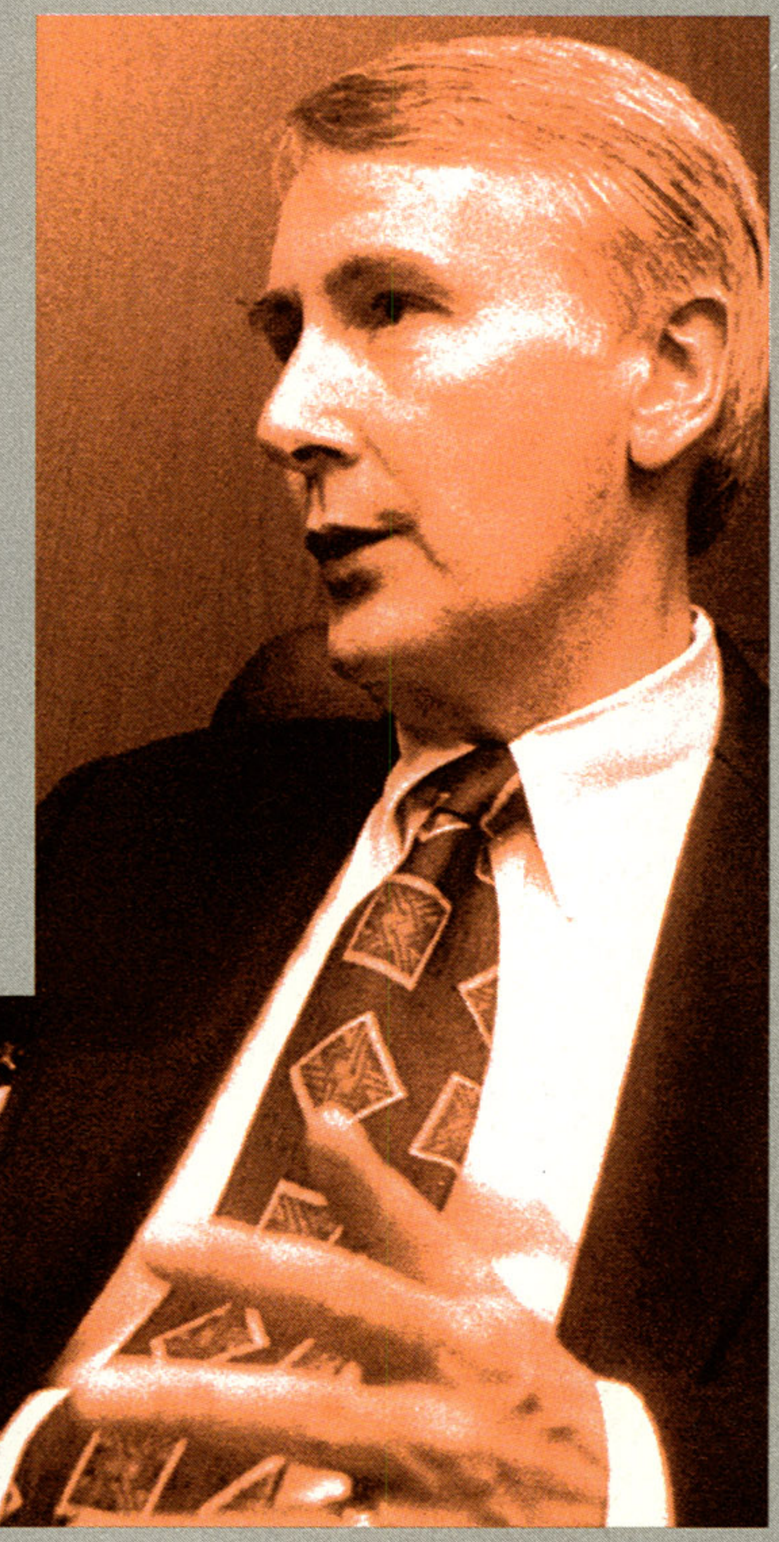






***Zelda 64* is one of the most exciting titles in development for 64DD (top left). *Creator* makes special use of 64DD's writable capabilities (top right). Japanese gamers get an early look at 64DD (bottom)**

Interview with Howard Lincoln



"Problem? There's no problem" says Nintendo of America's president. "Just look at the sales figures..."

Howard Lincoln is the Chairman of Nintendo of America. Over the past two and half years, **Next Generation** has interviewed Howard many times on the subject of Nintendo 64 and when it would finally arrive. Now that it's here, Nintendo's main man seems happy to use sales figures to swat away any pesky questions about whether the wait has been worth it. So what happened to issues beyond pure numbers? What happened to Nintendo's idealistic goals of quality? Are sales numbers all that matter?

NG: As of April 1997, how intently is Nintendo still pursuing a policy of "quality not quantity" in regards to N64 software?

Howard: We're very committed to quality. That's the driving principal behind the launch of Nintendo 64 and it will continue to be so as we build our library throughout 1997.

NG: So how well does the current Nintendo 64 lineup of games vindicate this philosophy? Certainly there aren't many Nintendo 64 games, but do you think all the games are of a high quality?

Howard: The current lineup of games absolutely vindicates our "quality" philosophy. According to TRST's data [the Toy Retail Tracking System, an independent evaluator of software sales numbers — but not, we might add, software quality] of the top 10 selling games during the holiday season, six were Nintendo 64.

First was *Super Mario 64*, third was *Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire*, five was *Killer Instinct Gold*, six was *Cruis'n USA*, eight was *Wave Race 64*, and nine was *Mortal Kombat Trilogy* from Midway.

And, of the remaining four in the top 10, two were Super NES games: *Donkey Kong Country 3* and *Donkey Kong Country 2*. That leaves just one Saturn title and just one PlayStation title in the Top 10.

We know consumers value quality games and Nintendo has provided them. We recently launched *Mario Kart 64*, and by the end of March will have already shipped 1 million games, which is incredible! In fact, *Mario Kart 64* is selling at a ratio of nearly 1:1 with the hardware, just like *Super Mario 64* has.

NG: With so few N64 games released, it's no wonder that N64 owners are snapping up whatever is made available. But this doesn't mean that they're all top quality. *Altered Beast* was a dreadful Genesis game. It sold thousands because it was one of the only games available, but that doesn't make it a classic.

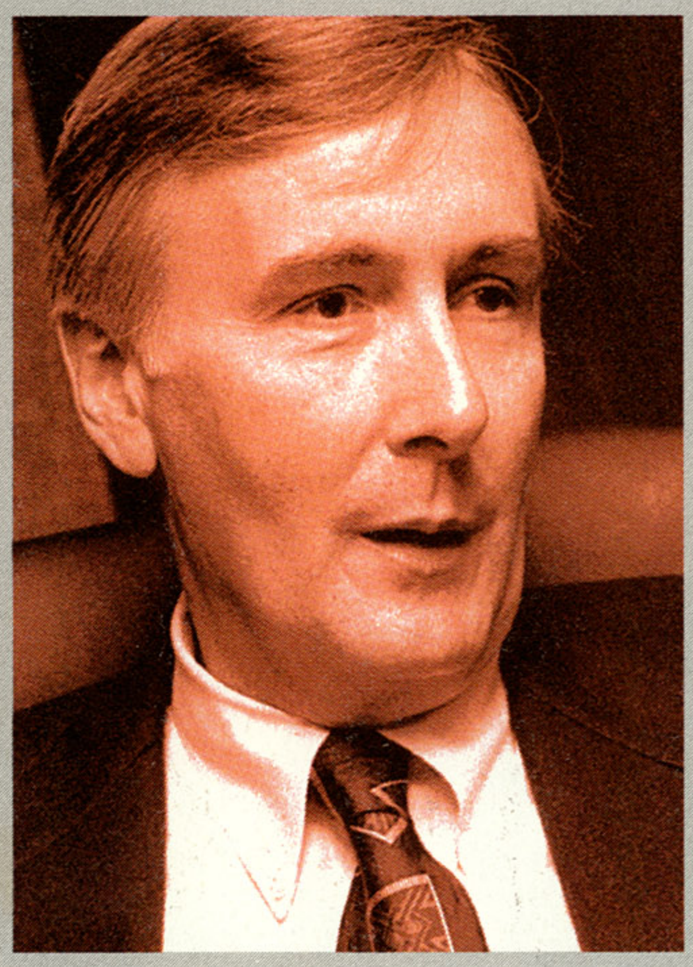
You mention *Super Mario 64*, and clearly it is a superb game.

But doesn't its strength simply serve to highlight the rest of the Nintendo 64 software lineup's inadequacies? If gamers know that Nintendo 64 is capable of *Super Mario 64*, why should they settle for anything less?

Howard: *Super Mario 64* highlights what the Nintendo 64 is capable of, and it does so exceptionally well. We shoot for that high level with every game we produce. While we may not always reach the extreme high watermark created by *Super Mario Kart 64*, the majority of the games already are mega-hits at the cash register. We're an entertainment business and we have an excellent track record of keeping consumers entertained and coming back for more.

Super Mario 64 is a groundbreaking title and was the perfect game to launch a new system. Now, with titles like *Mario Kart 64*, *Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire*, *Turok*, and others, we continue to set the standard for gameplay.

NG: But many would argue that the rest of N64's lineup fails to set any kind of



standard for gameplay. Increasingly, more and more gamers are criticizing Nintendo 64 software for being too safe, out of date, and only marginally superior in aesthetic quality to Sony and Sega's 32-bit competition.

Howard: I happen to disagree with all of your points.

First, these games are not "too safe." We've truly raised the bar on videogaming — our consumers and the phenomenal sales we're experiencing tell us so. Yes, *Mario* is a revolution, but so are *Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire*, *Wave Race 64*, *Turok*, and others because they provide a unique gaming experience. You couldn't put any of these Nintendo 64 games on a Playstation or Saturn or PC and get the same result.

Second: are Nintendo 64 games out of date? Not at all. These titles, including even some of the coin-op conversions, are revolutionizing the gaming industry. Nintendo 64 and its games helped grow the videogame industry up 23% in 1996 over 1995. It's true, we've introduced several titles based on coin-op versions, which have been wildly successful in the arcades. That's why we chose to bring them to Nintendo 64. The ability to add some new elements based on the advanced capabilities of the system is a reason for gamers to be excited. Of course, we couldn't have a library of entirely coin-op conversions, but the ability to offer sequels or new takes on popular properties only enhances the gaming experience.

Third, are they better than the games available for PlayStation and Saturn? Look at the sales numbers since Nintendo 64 launched last September. We've outsold our competitors every month since then and still continue to have software shortages at retail.

People buy hardware to play the software: What will provide the ultimate videogame experience? *Mario*, *Wave Race*, *Mario Kart*, *Turok* — all of our games provide an experience far beyond anything that offered on a 32-bit machine.

NG: How would you defend the "Dream Team" from accusations of being a spectacular failure? Where are the games from Angel Studios, GameTek, Virgin, Spectrum Holobyte, and Sierra?

Howard: With average unit sales of 270,000 per Nintendo 64 title, I'd venture to say that it's anything other than a major success. *Turok*, *Killer Instinct Gold*, or *Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire* — these games are from of our earliest "Dream Team" developers and publishers. And they've sold well beyond anyone's expectations. We still can't meet demand.

If anything, game developers are taking extra time to make sure they take full advantage of the capabilities of the system. Developing for Nintendo 64 is a new experience — the system is able to do things no other gaming platform can and that takes time for developers to maximize. Just because you haven't seen what Angel Studios is developing, doesn't mean nothing's happening. Rest assured you'll see more, and when you do, you'll be glad the developer took that extra bit of time.

NG: Three of the most popular game genres are sports sims, 3D fighters, and RPGs. Nintendo 64 doesn't offer gamers any titles in any of these categories, why?

Howard: We're not out to win the quantity contest — just quality. Therefore, we haven't rushed titles to market just so we can say we have one or more of everything. This will happen over the next ten months. We'll have games for all genres, and they'll be standouts.

NG: It was original, never-seen-anything-like-it-before titles such as *PilotWings* and *F-Zero* that made Super NES such a breath of fresh air at launch. Why has Nintendo 64's launch relied so much on updates of existing titles, and not the breaking of any new ground?

Howard: I believe your magazine was the first to declare *Super Mario 64* "the greatest videogame of all time." In my mind, that qualifies as an original, never-seen-anything-like-it-before title. I believe all our titles have broken the previous mold of gameplay. Some are familiar mega-hit titles, updated to 64-bit quality.

NG: Why are third parties having such a hard time making Nintendo 64 games?

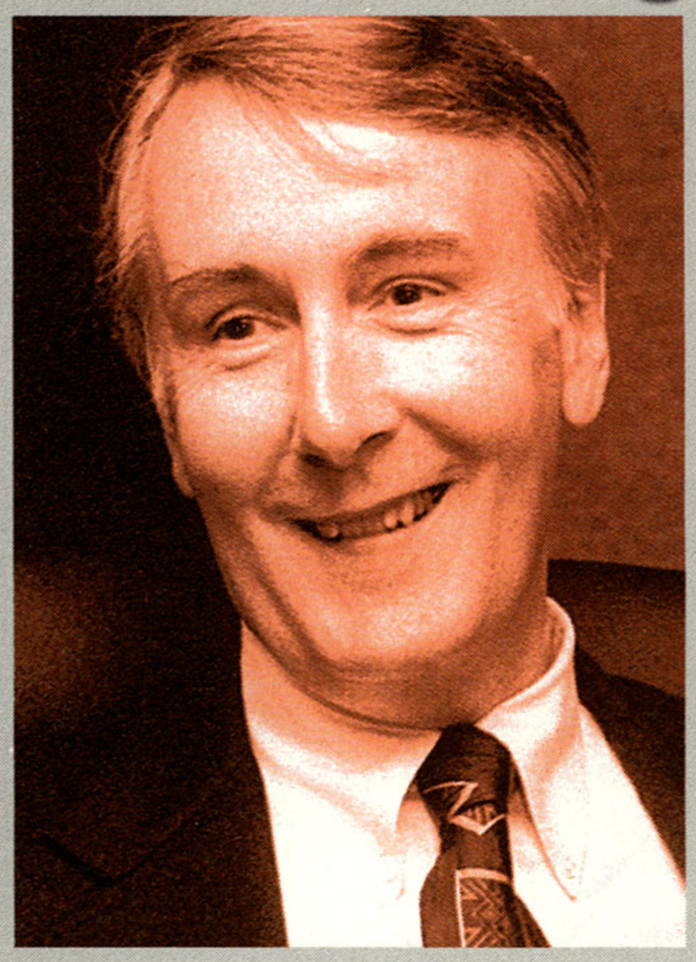
Howard: It takes time and resources to develop software for a completely new platform. There are too many mediocre titles in the marketplace on other platforms which aren't selling. Therefore, it's in a developer's best interest to take the time to learn and develop a game that takes advantage of the technical capabilities of a more advanced system.

When *Mario* was shown at E3, some developers went back to their drawing boards, realizing they needed to think more "out of the box." You get comfortable developing one way; you've got to take the time to break some old habits to take advantage of the new environment.

NG: Is the absence of any adventurous/innovative/ambitious support from third parties attributable to a rigid cartridge business model scaring off all but the "safest" projects?

Howard: Midway is about to launch its fourth title for Nintendo 64 and has several others underway. Acclaim just launched *Turok* — a very innovative game. We've got nearly 60 developers in the U.S. and Europe working on titles for Nintendo 64. And you can bet these titles will be all three — adventurous, innovative, and ambitious.

Our third-party titles number will never rival Sony, and we don't want it to. We're interested in having developers with the desire and technical know-how to create platinum-selling games for Nintendo 64. ng

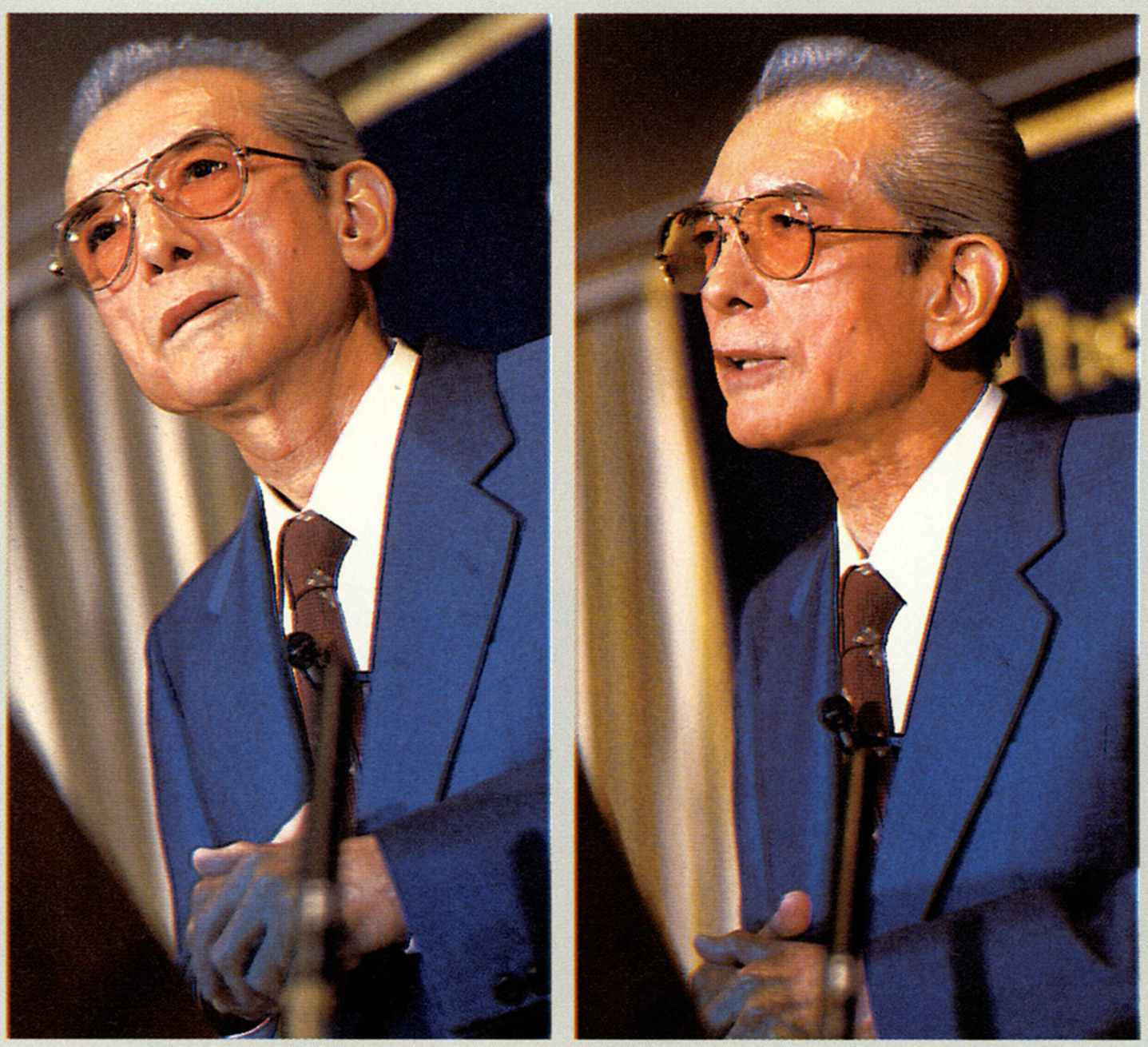


Many people put Nintendo's success down to the talents of software supremo Shigeru Miyamoto. However, without the ruthless business acumen of the company's president, Hiroshi Yamauchi, there would be no Nintendo systems on which to play Miyamoto's games

A Portrait of Hiroshi Yamauchi

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You don't mess with Nintendo president Hiroshi Yamauchi, because he never loses. At least, that's how it's always been. Until now, when the videogame industry has seen Sony raise the stakes with one of the most successful product launches of the decade. Now, the most powerful man in the videogame industry appears to be on the defensive. Nintendo has never had to trade blows with its competitors, remaining resolutely aloof. However, in recent times the steel-eyed Yamauchi has uncharacteristically taken to getting his hands dirty by publicly attacking PlayStation. Competition is a word that he struck from his dictionary some 48 years ago.



Mr. Yamauchi speaking at a recent press conference. It's often hard to believe that this mild-mannered looking man is the most feared and respected individual in the world's game industry

It's been said that if you want to know how Mr. Yamauchi thinks, observe the way he plays Go

In 1949, Hiroshi Yamauchi was appointed president of Yamauchi-Nintendo Corporation. His first move was to fire anyone and everyone who might oppose him. All managers, no matter how senior, found themselves in danger of losing their jobs. The recent death of his grandfather, though tragic, provided the young Yamauchi with the opportunity to rid his company of the conservative elements that he despised, enabling him to rule unopposed. Things would never be the same again.

At that time, Nintendo's core business was playing cards, or, more specifically, "Hanafuda," the traditional Japanese variety popular with the low-life gambling dens that had sprung up in Japan since World War II. The cards turned a modest profit, but nothing spectacular, and a frustrated Yamauchi decided to embrace the more fashionable, plastic-coated cards favored by westerners. He struck a deal with Walt Disney, put Mickey Mouse on the backs of the cards, and virtually doubled the company profits overnight. In 1959, he took the company public and Nintendo Company Ltd. [NCL] was born.



The company's Kyoto headquarters is as secure as Fort Knox. No one gets in without an invite

Even then, competition was a secondary concern. Nintendo had a virtual monopoly thanks to its extensive distribution system that put NCL cards in just about every outlet, from tiny shops to the newly established department stores and toy shops. That was Yamauchi's first success. His second was hiring a young engineer named Gumpei Yokoi to head up a new internal division — not for cards, but for games.

According to David Scheff, author of *Game Over*, when Yokoi asked what he should make, Yamauchi replied, "Something great." It preceded Nintendo 64 by many years, but in 1970, "something great" amounted to a hugely successful toy. Called the Ultra Hand, Yokoi's plastic robot arm sold over 1 million units and proved not only that he had a natural flair for innovation, but that Yamauchi had an instinct for backing the right product at the right time. It was this instinct that lead him to push ahead with a game console when, after the spectacular Atari crash, every market in the world had declared videogame consoles a financial dead end.

It has been said that if you want to know how Yamauchi thinks, you have only to observe the way that he plays the Japanese game, Go. One of the most complex boardgames to learn, players spend many years developing their skills and moving up through the ranks, which are graded like a martial art. Only the very best tacticians could ever hope to move beyond Q10, the "black belt," to reach a Dan grade.

Yamauchi is a seventh Dan master, and his playing style has been described variously as forceful, aggressive, open, flexible in defense, and unstoppable in the face of weakness. Arnold Greenberg, chairman of then-thriving Coleco, never got around to playing Go with Yamauchi. If he had, he may never have had to face the explosive wrath at the Consumer Electronics Show in 1983…

Nintendo was in negotiations with Atari at the time. Lacking the distribution and influence needed to conquer the U.S. market, Yamauchi believed the best chance for his new Famicom console was to license it to the then-struggling, but still highly

regarded, Atari Corporation for exclusive U.S. distribution rights. The deal backfired when Coleco ran a computer version of *Donkey Kong* on its Adam system at CES. Atari execs saw it and thought Nintendo had betrayed them. What use was Famicom without one of the most successful arcade titles ever? Yamauchi acted decisively. He arranged to meet Greenberg and his associates without telling them why. In *Game Over*, Scheff describes what happened: "Yamauchi entered the room abruptly and, without addressing anyone, stood at the end of the table. He became, as one of those present put it, 'unglued.' He began with a breathy, high-pitched tirade in a Marlon Brando monotone and quickly became loud and abusive. With a piercing cry, he swung his arm in an arc in front of him, shooting his outstretched index finger toward Greenberg… When Greenberg turned to [Minoru] Arakawa [president of NOA] for help, he was met with a cold stare. By the time Yamauchi wound down, no one in the room said a word. The translator finally began to speak. 'Mr. Yamauchi is very upset,' the man said."

Needless to say, Coleco buckled. Yamauchi threatened a lawsuit that would "leave nothing of the company" if it continued to use *Donkey Kong* to promote the Adam. As it was, Atari never intended to launch the Famicom. The company wanted to buy the rights, bury the system, and leave the way clear for its own Atari 7800. In the end, it didn't have the cash, and Nintendo had to launch the Famicom itself as the NES. Yamauchi must be relieved that Atari never got its incompetent hands on Nintendo's seminal console. If this encounter proved anything, it was that there was only one way to do business with Yamauchi: you did it his way, or not at all.

This was something the U.S. market found hard to appreciate, not least because of restrictive licensing agreements imposed upon it during the *Mario* boom years. Yamauchi had a plan. If he could control the flow of software for his machine, then he could control the quality, and if he could do that, his instincts would ensure that only the best titles would reach the streets. As long as Nintendo could maintain the quality, there would be no competition.

But competition is healthy, and as Nintendo grew into the most successful videogame company of all time, its iron will began to wane. Sega, whose Master System failed to make even a dent in Famicom sales sheets, beat it to market with the next generation of home gaming systems. The Genesis hardware, along with a hip marketing campaign, left Nintendo scrabbling to catch up in the lucrative U.S. market. Yamauchi had underestimated the opposition. He couldn't even conceive of a competitor, much less one armed with superior technology. While the Genesis was only mildly successful in Japan, its sales elsewhere in the world were soaring.

As Nintendo grew into the biggest videogame company of all time, its iron will began to wane

Characteristically, Yamauchi decided to ignore the Sega success and concentrate on his latest project, the 16-bit Super Famicom. He would rely on his instincts to see him through. When the Super Famicom was launched in Japan in 1990, it stormed the market. Yamauchi knew that Sega's weakness was its home market, and, true to form, he became unstoppable.

As a Japanese-limited company, Nintendo will always put its home market first. Yamauchi's native success with the Super Famicom saved the day, though it was largely thanks to another of his intuitive successes — bringing the best out of designer Shigeru Miyamoto, a young man who had impressed the stern chairman with his lively childish manner some ten years previously. He hired him to come up with another "something great," and he did. Over and over again.



Mr. Yamauchi's executive decisions generally favor the Japanese market over foreign ones

First *Donkey Kong*, then *Mario*, then *Super Mario* and eventually, of course, *Super Mario 64*. Once again, Yamauchi kept the competition at bay. He didn't consider Sega a serious competitor, with sales of the Super Famicom approaching 50 million units worldwide.

But that was then, and this is now. Although Nintendo 64 is surging ahead of the Saturn and approaching PlayStation sales figures in the U.S., in Japan, the most precious of Yamauchi's markets, all is not so



Mr. Hiroshi Yamauchi leaves the Foreign Correspondents press conference with NCL PR hotshots Yasuhiro Minagawa (left) and Hiroshi Imanshi (far left), two of Nintendo's most trusted employees

rosy. Both the Sony and Sega machines are entrenched thanks to a combination of a two-year lead and an abundance of the most popular Japanese genres, beat 'em ups and RPGs. Conspicuously, Nintendo 64 currently has neither to offer its audience. It has serious competition on its own soil — worse, Yamauchi's legendary instinct is beginning to look fallible.

1995's Shoshinkai show was, obviously, a key event for Nintendo 64. It was here a launch date would be announced, playable demos would be available for the first time, and, most importantly, Yamauchi would have to convince an increasingly cynical audience of his console's benefits — a challenging task, considering the growing success of the PlayStation and Saturn.

Another of Yamauchi's intuitive successes was to bring the best out of a young Shigeru Miyamoto

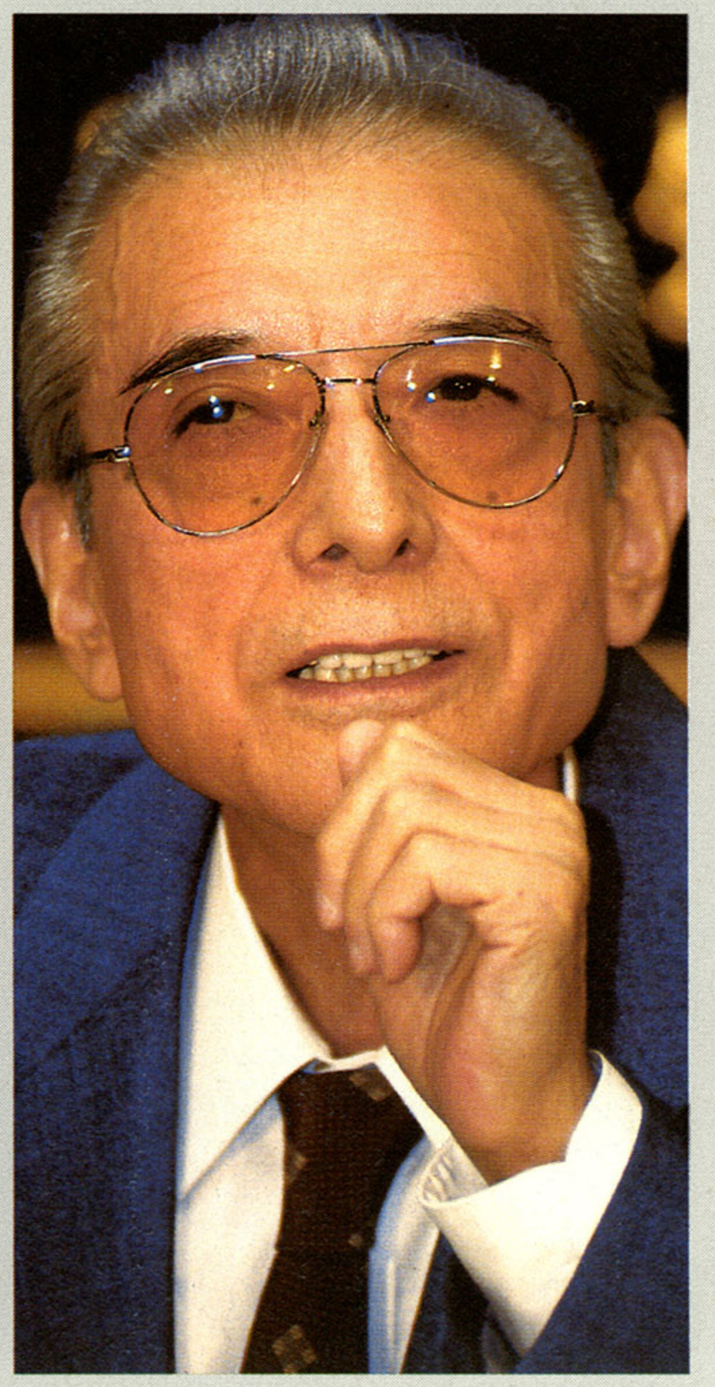
Things didn't begin well. Just days before the show, Yamauchi — once again exhibiting his notoriously single-minded business practice — pulled ten playable demos from the itinerary, alienating both "Dream Team" developers and avid gamers in one fell swoop. In their place was an admittedly brilliant playable version of *Mario 64* and a very early version of *Kirby Bowl 64*.

On the first day of the event, however, Yamauchi made up for this controversial move with a vitriolic speech bitterly condemning the current game industry. Here, he warned of the dangers present in releasing too many poor games and berated software companies for their business tactics: "They will try to develop as many titles as possible so at least one of them will be a hit. The users will simply reject these third-rate software titles."

His alternative was simple — to intricately control the amount and quality of third-party development so only the best titles would be released and gamers would not become alienated by a flood of poor software. In this way, he painted Nintendo, and its highly controlled Dream Team philosophy, as the savior of the software industry. Onlookers were, for the time being, grudgingly convinced.

It is a policy Yamauchi still stands by, as he pointed out at the recent "Foreign Correspondents Club" conference in Tokyo: "Some argue the more software there is, the better the sales can be, but Nintendo is against this kind of opinion. We have elected to release fewer titles, and only splendid games will be introduced for Nintendo 64.





Hiroshi Yamauchi: speaker of tradeshow vitroles, maker of playing cards, seventh Dan master of Go, shrewd businessman, and instinctive employer of geniuses such as Shigeru Miyamoto

That was our big policy for the introduction of N64 to the U.S. and Japanese markets."

But, following 1995's Shoshinkai event, it would be a long time before material proof of Nintendo 64's true abilities were delivered. Yamauchi, who had always gone to great pains to stress the difference between Nintendo's console and the 32-bit machines, was determined not to launch Nintendo 64 within a year of the PlayStation and Saturn. A year, he felt, would be enough to stress the technological advance represented by his machine without keeping people waiting too long.

All did not go according to plan, as Yamauchi admitted: "The N64 is very different in terms of quality compared to its present competitors and we could not achieve the progress in designing the hardware and software as quickly as we originally planned. Our competitors introduced their 32-bit machines around December 1994 and Nintendo hoped to make its hardware available at the end of 1995, at least in Japan. But, in fact, because of the difficulties in coming up with good hardware and software, because of the vast improvements in quality involved, it was delayed seven months."

For the first time in Nintendo's history, the company had missed two holiday seasons with a hardware launch. "It was a big handicap for Nintendo," admitted Yamauchi, and he was right. The Japanese business press, impressed by the quality of Sony's machine and distinctly unimpressed by Nintendo 64's launch delay, began speculating over Nintendo's position as market leader. Were the company's, or more specifically Yamauchi's, days of dominance numbered?

The six months following the Japanese launch and the slightly disappointing domestic sales figures reflect the cynicism of the country's business press. Things started well with a complete sell-out, but, by the end of '96, Nintendo had shipped a modest 1.85 million machines in Japan and there were still 140,000 available at retail level. In America, 2.41 million machines were shipped in the first three months and sold out completely.

Part of the Japanese problem lay with software quality — something Yamauchi had stipulated would not be a concern. Although *Super Mario 64* was everything Nintendo had promised (and more besides), other titles have failed to live up to expectations, despite the supposedly strict quality control measures. A good example

is *Mario Kart 64*. At Shoshinkai '95, Yamauchi boasted this title would indicate just how advanced Nintendo 64 was: "People will not be able to see the uniqueness of *Mario Kart* until it is at least 80% finished."

In the end, however, *Mario Kart*, although a thrillingly addictive multiplayer title, is not the triple-A product gamers had been promised. It is, in many respects, simply a graphically superior version of the Super NES original, with visuals falling some distance short of those so famously generated by *Super Mario 64*.

So how did this important game get released in its present state, despite Yamauchi's assurances about quality? One reason may be that Yamauchi doesn't play videogames. He dismisses the importance of this, citing that "the N64 has been praised by people in Japan and the U.S." Perhaps if the game had been tested more comprehensively prior to its release it would not have slipped through the net as a slightly flawed product. In effect, the presence of this title, and much worse offenders such as *Cruis'n USA* and *Shadows of the Empire*, shows that the Nintendo quality assurance program is far from infallible.



Howard Lincoln respectfully describes Mr. Yamauchi is a "tough old bird"

Yamauchi was determined not to launch Nintendo 64 within a year of PlayStation and Saturn

There are also problems more deeply embedded in Nintendo's relationship with Japanese developers. Last year, SquareSoft — which had produced countless top-selling titles for the NES and Super NES — announced that it would not be producing games solely for the Nintendo 64. Since then, the company has released *Final Fantasy VII* on the PlayStation to glowing reviews and incredible sales. Enix, responsible for the influential Super NES series, *Dragon Quest*, has also moved over to the PlayStation to further the RPG saga, which is perhaps a more poignant blow: Yamauchi named the proposed Nintendo 64 version of *Dragon Quest VII* at Shoshinkai '95 as one of the titles to judge the merits of the machine's Bulky Drive (64DD) by.

Typically, though, Yamauchi now vehemently plays down the relevance of such setbacks: "People who are knowledgeable about this matter know that it will take four years for Yuji Horii to develop a new *Dragon Quest* title. I would like to ask, who can be sure that even a talented person like Mr Horii can, in four years, design a game better than its predecessors? During this four-year period, Mr. Horii could have a slump, or an illness… Anything could happen." This is a rather unconvincing statement, however. Square managed to develop *Final Fantasy VII* within two years, and, more importantly, if Yamauchi really believed it would take Horii four years to develop a new *Dragon Quest* title, why did he announce that *Dragon Quest VII* would be ready for the launch of Nintendo's Bulky Drive accessory?

Yamauchi is just as dismissive when the topic turns to Sony. When asked at the conference if he was concerned about the company's plans to release 800 PlayStation titles in '97, his reply was filled with venom. "The software market is in a critical condition because of a flood of unimportant, boring videogames. It reminds me of when Atari was enjoying a boom in the USA with the first generation of videogames. I had the chance to meet up with the company's management at the time and they were saying Atari would be one of the biggest and most profitable U.S. corporations. But, in fact, that was the company's peak time. Within two years, the industry Atari knew had almost disappeared. A flood of uninteresting videogames meant that most users abandoned the company's game system. Entertainment is not a necessity to daily life. When it is not interesting, we can leave it and ignore it. You point to 800 titles. I just wonder who can actually buy 800 titles! I'm afraid you just do not realize that many of these will sell less than 1,000 copies. Few retailers and people in the distribution channel are making money. In fact, what happened to Atari can happen any time in Japan!"

Yamauchi believes this year will be the turning point in fortunes for the 32-bit consoles. He is also convinced that talented programmers and designers who want to develop for Nintendo 64 are being held back by companies determined to produce for the 32-bit platforms, companies which are doomed, he asserts, because they mistake quantity for quality. "Some people are saying this is the era of software in the industry, but in my mind it is not. It is the age where only selected software can survive."

As long as games like *Mario 64* are produced and Yamauchi's sound business mind stays focused, Nintendo will retain its quintessential place in the game industry. But there are chinks in the big boss's armor. Though he is dismissive about his rivals, he is objective enough to realize that Nintendo is not completely infallible: "If you ask me about the effect on Nintendo that *Dragon Quest*'s departure has had, I would have to say there is no concrete effect. However, I cannot deny this announcement has had some psychological influence on Nintendo. It is true we have been hit psychologically." ng

In Development

The following list represents every Nintendo 64 game in development. Many are still in the planning stage, but the list does paint an overall picture of what's coming. Could these games resolve the software library issues? You be the judge

Battle Sport II
Publisher: 3DO
Developer: Studio 3DO
Release Date: TBA
One of Studio 3DO's best efforts to date, the *Battle Sport* series blends complex sports strategies with fast arcade action. An advanced 3D engine and Nintendo 64 visuals promise an even more dazzling version of one of videogame's best future sports.

Blade & Barrel (Ultra Combat)
Publisher: GT Interactive
Developer: Software Creations
Release Date: Q2
Ultra Combat is one of many 3D helicopter shooters in development for Nintendo 64 featuring an emphasis on urban combat and a split-screen, two-player mode. Look for more multiplayer action games as Nintendo 64's processing power makes split screen a comparatively simple matter.



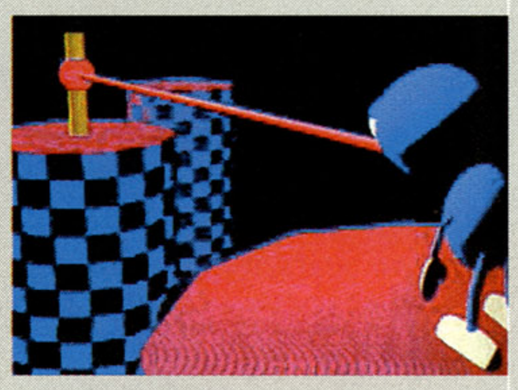
Body Harvest
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: DMA Design
Release Date: Q3 '97
From DMA, who brought you *Lemmings*, *Body Harvest* invites you to control a variety of vehicles on rescue missions in an alien-invaded Earth. This is one of the most original N64 games in the works.



Buggy Boogie
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Angel Studios
Release Date: TBA
More than two years in development, *Buggy Boogie* is best described as a cross between *Doom* and *Battlezone*. One of the most impressive of the "Ultra 64" originals, it remains to be seen how the game holds up in what is quickly becoming its old age.



Chameleon Twist
Publisher: Nihon System Supply
Developer: Nihon System Supply
Release Date: TBA
Guide a cutesy chameleon around a *Mario*-esque world using his flexible tongue as your iweapon. With mechanics similar to *Bionic Commando*, this should provide an amusing if obvious diversion.



Clay Fighter 63 1/3
Publisher: Interplay
Developer: Interplay
Release Date: Q2 '97
Missing the serious fighting action of a game like *Mace* or *Dark Rift*, *Clay Fighter 63 1/3* is meant to be a mock fighting game with 2D graphics and stop-motion animation. The game features more than 12 twisted characters including one called HoboCop and guarantees a light-hearted take on the familiar fighting game formula.

Blast Corps
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Rare
Release Date: Q1 '97
One of the most unique titles in the works from Nintendo, *Blast Corps* puts the player in control of a variety of vehicles with the purpose of clearing a safe path for a runaway chemical carrier. Sound strange? It is, but it's also fast paced and explosive, two things that help enable videogame fun.



Contra 64
Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami
Release Date: Q1 '97 (Japan)
Expect a polygonal shooter with the trademark *Contra* arsenal of explosive weapons and pyrotechnic frills. With a recent PlayStation version of *Contra* hitting some snags in the conversion to 3D, *Contra 64* will feature a tweaked or entirely re-invented 3D engine.

Cruis'n World
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Rare
Release Date: TBA
After the disappointing *Cruis'n USA* translation, fans of the series will be watching this one closely. Hopefully, this time around the job will be done with a little more care. Perhaps the more contemporary *Cruis'n World* will provide a better starting place.

Cu On Pa
Publisher: T&E Soft
Developer: T&E Soft
Release Date: Q2 '97 (Japan)
From T & E Soft, a developer best known for its numerous golf games, comes *Cu On Pa*, a game best described as Rubik's Cube meets *Tetris*. With *Tetrisphere* representing its only real competition, this should be interesting.

Dark Rift
Publisher: Vic Tokai
Developer: Kronos
Release Date: TBA
From Kronos, the people who brought you the creative but ill-fated *Criticom* for PlayStation, comes *Dark Rift*, a 3D fighting game with true freedom to move about the ring. Though *Criticom* had serious gameplay drawbacks in the form of stiff animation and an under-developed sense of balance, Kronos claims to have learned its lesson.



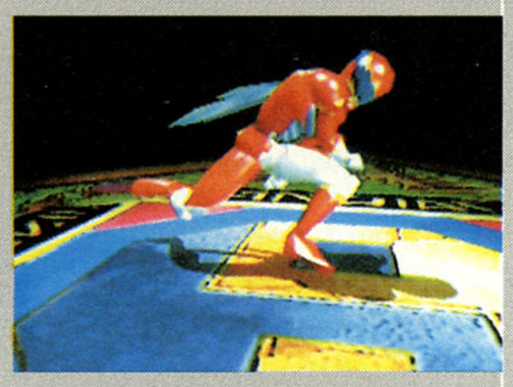
Descent
Publisher: Interplay
Developer: Interplay
Release Date: TBA
Combine the speed and analog controller of N64, and playing *Descent* starts to sound like a new experience. That's what Interplay is counting on — a revolutionary PC game on Nintendo 64.



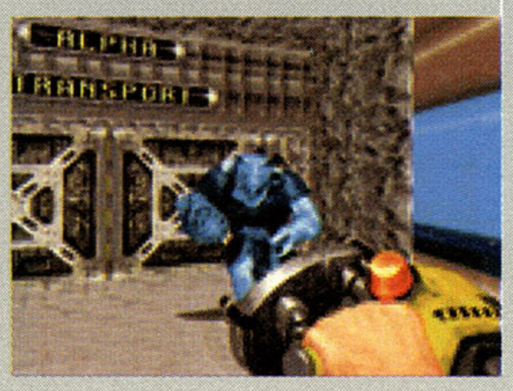
Doraemon
Publisher: Epoch
Developer: Epoch
Release Date: TBA
The blue cat in *Doraemon* is a cultural icon in Japan, but something of a non-starter here. *Doraemon* may see a release in the U.S. thanks to its brightly colored graphics and *Mario*-derivative gameplay, but in all truth it's not all that likely.



Dual Heroes
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Developer: Hudson Soft
Release Date: TBA
Hudson's first stab at the 3D fighting genre looks impressive at this early stage. If the fluidly animated polygonal figures already in place are matched with solid gameplay design, Nintendo 64 may just have its first good 3D fighting game. The game's fiercest competition will come in the form of Atari Games's *Mace*.



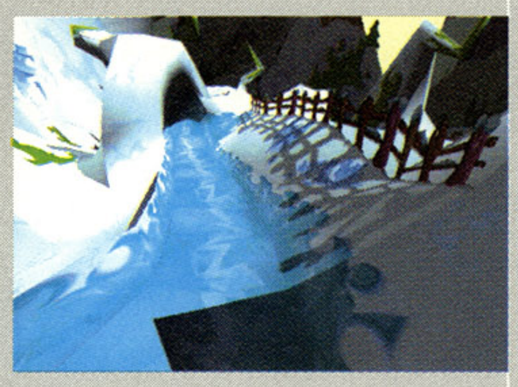
Duke Nukem 3D
Publisher: GT Interactive
Developer: Apogee
Release Date: Q4 '97
First there was *Doom 64* then *Hexen 64* and now first-person action in the form of *Duke Nukem 3D* is coming to Nintendo 64. As long as Nintendo can sort out the questions about controversial scenes such as one that takes place in a strip club, the translation from PC to Nintendo 64 should be seamless. Looking at other recent first-person shooter translations — *Duke* should be something special on Nintendo 64 just as it has been on the PC.



Dynamite Soccer
Publisher: Imagineer
Developer: Imagineer
Release Date: Q1
One of many forthcoming Soccer titles for Nintendo 64, *Dynamite Soccer* features polygonal players and real International teams. At present, the game is showing impressive speed and graphics and could end up one of the good ones.

Earthworm Jim 64
Publisher: Playmates
Developer: Shiny
Release Date: TBA
The worm du jour finally makes a 3D appearance. A planned PlayStation version was scrapped in favor of this *Mario*-esque Nintendo 64 conversion. Expect similar gameplay mechanics found in the previous incarnations of the series.

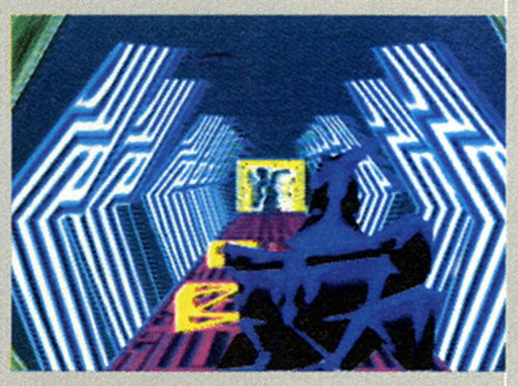
Ed
Publisher: Ubi Soft
Developer: Ubi Soft
Release Date: TBA
Ed is yet another in a seemingly endless stream of character-based action games for Nintendo 64. The game features cute characters from the imaginative team of designers who brought us the graphically entrancing *Ray Man*.



FIFA 64
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: EA Sports
Release Date: Q3 '97
EA's pivotal soccer title will appear in Japan first under the title *J-League Live*. In the U.S. the game will retain the FIFA banner and feature the world teams seen in previous *FIFA* games. Smoothly animated polygonal figures are par for the course and EA's years of experience in the field should work well to create the first great soccer game for Nintendo 64.



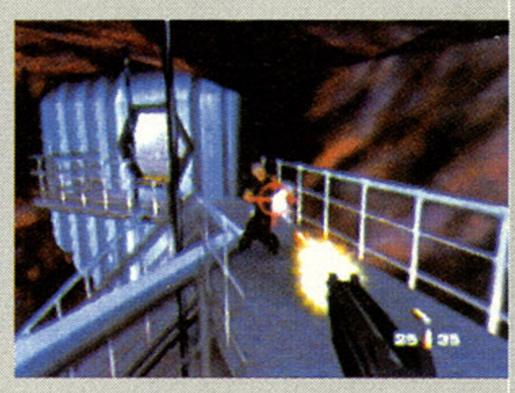
Freak Boy
Publisher: Virgin
Developer: Burst
Release Date: TBA
An innovative idea in *Freak Boy* is granting the lead character the ability to morph into weapons rather than simply carrying them. This 3D action game somehow manages to retain the trademark anti-aliased look of Nintendo 64 titles.



Ganbare Goeman 5
Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami
Release Date: TBA
One of the most variety-packed Super NES games, *Ganbare Goeman* (*Legend of the Mystical Ninja* in the U.S.) featured the odd antics of a couple of would-be Ninjas. The Nintendo 64 version is filled with the sub-games and fast action that made its predecessors so popular and features the typically impressive Konami graphics.



Goldeneye 007
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Rare
Release Date: Q2 '97
From second party developers, Rare, comes *Goldeneye 007* an over-the-shoulder game based on the James Bond series. The game promises to be a blend of action and puzzle solving and is another of the original Ultra 64 games suffering from persistent delays.

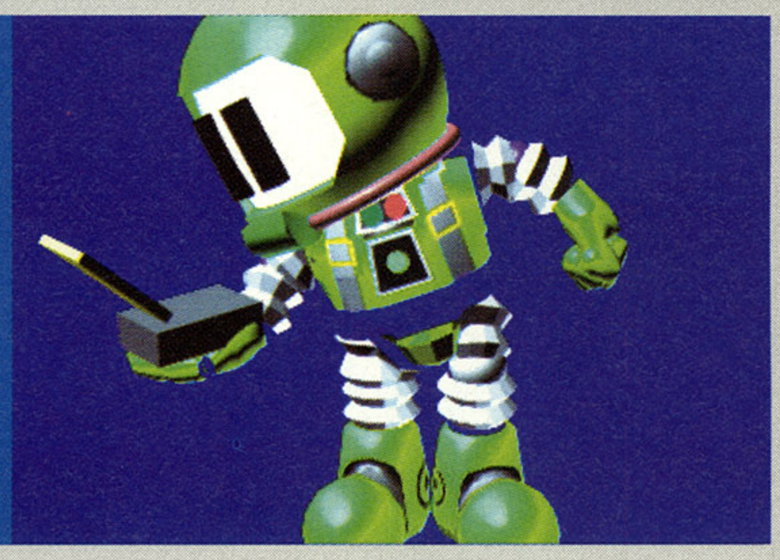


Hexen 64
Publisher: GTI
Developer: Id
Release Date: TBA
Id's second first-person shooter to make its way to Nintendo 64 is *Hexen 64* — the mystical follow up to *Doom*. Recently made available on competing systems, it will require a new sense of refinement on Nintendo 64 to make it stand out as anything special. One feature unique to Nintendo 64 is a four-player, split-screen mode.



Holy Magic Century Eltale (Japan)
Publisher: Imagineer
Developer: Imagineer
Release Date: Q2 '97
With a charismatic young boy as its hero, this simple-looking 3D RPG features surprisingly complex gameplay. Though the look is not likely to impress American gamers, the sheer lack of RPG alternatives on Nintendo 64 may force a deeper look by fans of the genre.

Bomberman 64
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Developer: Hudson Soft
Release Date: Q2 '97 (Japan)
Nintendo 64's four controller ports enables players to take full advantage of this multiplayer classic. Hudson is using 3D technology for a *Loaded*-style overhead perspective and Nintendo 64's graphic effects are said to be put to good use. What is of key importance here is how the 64-bit update will make use of the infectious gameplay.



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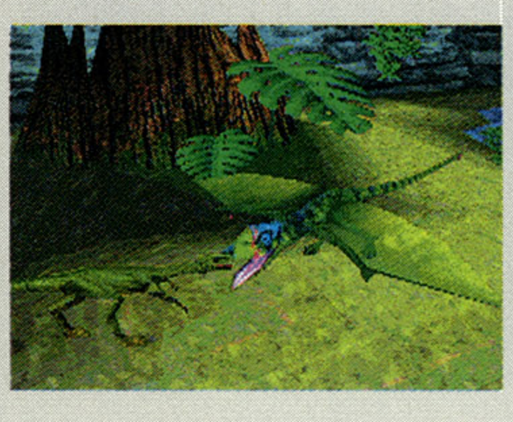
Human Grand Prix F1
Publisher: Human Entertainment
Developer: Human Entertainment
Release Date: Q2 '97
F1 Grand Prix is one of a precious few realistic racing games in the works for Nintendo 64. With a focus on real Grand Prix-style racing, this could be the game that finally satisfies the many sim fans waiting in vain for less arcade-type games to arrive.

Imagineer's Multiracing Championship
Publisher: Imagine
Developer: Genki
Release Date: Q2 '97
It's a *Sega Rally*-inspired, off-road racing game with lush graphics and lots of track variety. Mud gives way to pavement, changing the physics of the analog control. Penciled in as a Jolting Pack-compatible title, this should challenge Seta's *Rev Limit*.



J-League Perfect Soccer
Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami
Release Date: Available Now (Japan)
This Konami soccer game lacks realism, but the analog control adds a sophisticated level of maneuverability. When the game comes to the U.S., it will likely abandon the J-League allegiance in favor of the FIFA license.

Jurassic Park 2: The Lost World
Publisher: DreamWorks
Developer: DreamWorks
Release Date: TBA
Michael Crichton's second dino-novel is about to hit the silver screen and the franchise has stretched to Nintendo 64. Expect the Nintendo 64 version to resemble the current PlayStation game which features track-based 2D gameplay in a 3D environment. Count on visuals par excellence at the hands of DreamWorks.



Creator
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo
Release Date: TBA
Mario Paint meets God? With special attention from Shigeru Miyamoto, *Creator* enables players to create and manipulate real-time 3D environments and characters much the same way the *2D Mario Paint* did for SNES. Slated for 64DD, the writable format will enable players to create interactive masterpieces in true 3D. Unfortunately *Creator* has fallen prey to one delay after the next putting it in the same class as *Buggy Boogie* and *Body Harvest*.



King of Pro Baseball
Publisher: Imagineer
Developer: Imagineer
Release Date: Q2
Another Japanese-style baseball game that will probably never see the light of day in the U.S, *King of Pro Baseball* features cartoon-style graphics and super deformed players.



Kirby's Air Ride
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo
Release Date: TBA
Kirby, the enemy-engulfing amorphous blob, will make an appearance on Nintendo 64. *Kirby's Air Ride* is a 3D action/racing game with cutesy graphics and pastels. One for the younger crowd?

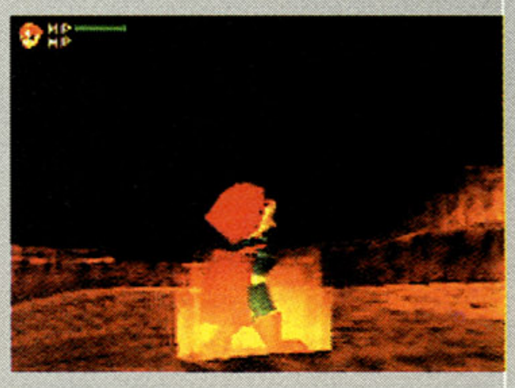


Lamborghini 64
Publisher: Titus
Developer: Titus
Release Date: Q3 '97
French software house Titus finally emerges with a sequel to its Super NES driving game. *Lamborghini 64* features a split-screen four player race mode as well as a choice of classic Lamborghini vehicles, including *Diablo* and *Countach*.

Lode Runner
Publisher: Bandai
Developer: Big Bang
Release Date: TBA
Based on the original Macintosh classic, *Lode Runner* is a clever puzzle game featuring 3D environments and tons of addictive levels. Details of how the game's classic puzzle style will be updated for Nintendo 64 have not yet been revealed, but with a solid gameplay model already in place, this could be a nice addition to Nintendo 64.

Mah Jong Master
Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami
Release Date: Available Now (Japan)
Since there is basically no market for Mah Jong games in the U.S., it's highly unlikely this game will ever be released here. But *Mah Jong Master* is looking to be an admirable stab at adding visual sparkle to this otherwise bland gaming concept.

Mahou Seiki Eruteiru
Publisher: Imagineer
Developer: Imagineer
Release Date: TBA
An action oriented RPG with more than a hint of *Zelda* about it, *Mahou Seiki Eruteiru* is creating a small buzz in Japan, but is unlikely to set hearts pounding in the U.S..

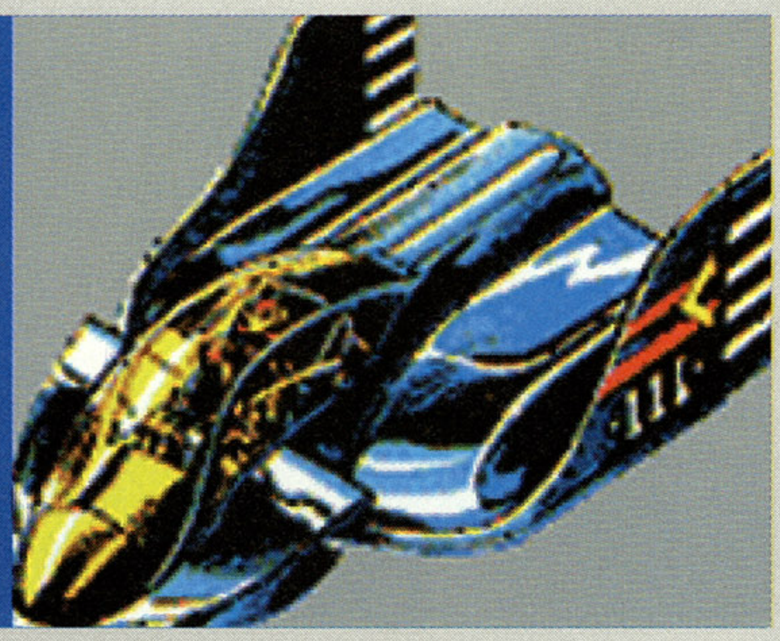


Metroid 64
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo
Release Date: TBA
Super Metroid for Super NES set a new standard in level design and plot interaction with its hours of complex gameplay. One of the most eagerly awaited games for Nintendo 64, *Metroid 64* aims to take the cinematic quality of the SNES game to the next level in a superior 3D experience. One of the few truly promising Nintendo games not being handled directly by Miyamoto, *Metroid 64* is as important an action game to the Nintendo 64 library as any. Even without Miyamoto, it's doubtful that Nintendo will allow this one to falter.

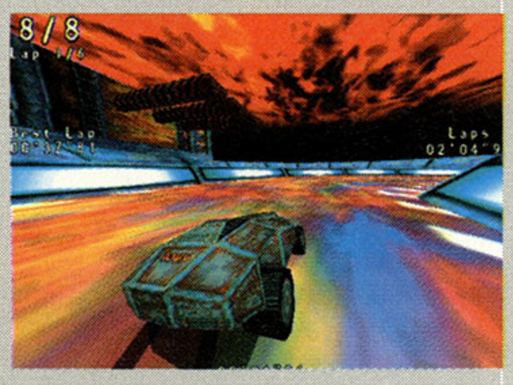
Earthbound 64 (Mother 3)
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo
Release Date: TBA
One of the newly designated killer apps for 64DD, *Earthbound 64* could be the first game to take advantage of the hardware peripheral. *Earthbound 64* is an RPG aimed at younger gamers though the 3D graphics and unusual scenarios promise an interesting game for all ages. Thanks to the added storage capacity of 64DD the game is already displaying more detailed environments than any other Nintendo 64 title.



F-Zero 64
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo
Release Date: TBA
Although elements of the original design ended up in the less ambitious *Wave Race 64* project, *F-Zero 64* promises to be an amazing achievement in Miyamoto's career. He has stated in interviews that he wanted to do a sequel for the SNES, and that Nintendo 64 finally gave him the processing power he needed. Morphing cars, strange new worlds and traditional *F-Zero* gameplay will make this futuristic racing game something great.



POD
Publisher: Ubi Soft
Developer: Ubi Soft
Release Date: TBA
Debuting as an MMX-enhanced PC racing game, *POD* is a futuristic race for your life. The PC version of *POD* is one of the most graphically dramatic games ever made and is expected to make an extremely smooth Nintendo 64 conversion.



Power Pro Baseball 64
Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami
Release Date:
Available Now (Japan)
Konami's latest foray into the baseball arena is perhaps its most impressive to date. The slick if cartoon-esque graphics are enhanced by analog control and very smooth animation. Unlikely to see a U.S. release because of its traditional Japanese graphic style, *Power Pro Baseball 64* is a good game made for a particular audience.

Quake
Publisher: Midway
Developer: id
Release Date: TBA
The Nintendo 64 is perfectly suited to producing the kind of 3D environments found in *Quake*. Analog control, anti-aliasing and instant loading should all but guarantee a superior conversion. *Quake* is to be programmed by the same team who produced *Doom 64*.

Raze
Publisher: Interplay
Developer: Interplay
Release Date: Q1 1998
Using TSR's AD&D license and originally entitled *Realms of Valor*, *Raze* is a fighting game set in the Realms of the Underworld. The game will also feature multiplayer functions.

Red Baron
Publisher: Sierra
Developer: Sierra
Release Date: TBA
This World War II flight/action game is one of the more original titles in development for the system. Sim and arcade fans alike will enjoy the realistic action as they take bi- and tri-planes into intense 3D dogfights. Another of the original "Ultra 64" games, *Red Baron* has seen its share of delays.

Rev Limit
Publisher: Seta
Developer: Seta
Release Date: Q3 '97
Rev Limit is shaping up to be a exciting racing game. Seta has never been a company known for its graphical achievement, but *Rev Limit* could change that reputation. The player can drive a selection of Japanese supercars in this visually stunning racer.



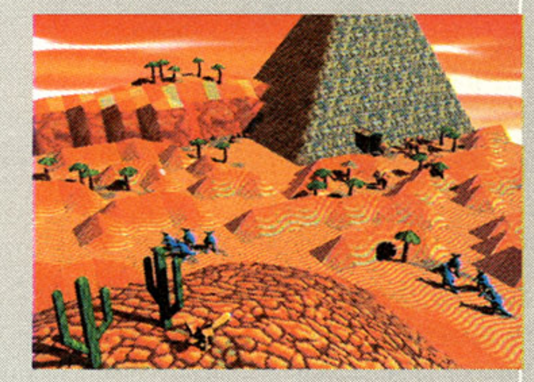
Robotech: Crystal Dreams
Publisher: Philips
Developer: Gametek
Release Date: TBA
In development for more than a year and a half, *Robotech* from U.S.-based Gametek delivers the experience of the Japanimation series to Nintendo 64 in the form of a space/flight simulator. Early looks at the game haven't proven much graphically, but with the rich back-story of the *Robotech* universe, the game may still have a chance.



Robotron X
Publisher: Midway
Developer: Player 1
Release Date: TBA
This techno update to Eugene Jarvis's classic failed to deliver on its considerable promise onPlayStation. Maybe they'll get things right the second time around. One thing is sure; the dual directional pads on the Nintendo 64 controller are perfectly suited for the *Robotron* series. Now, if we can just see the whole playing field at once, this could be a major hit.

Roto Gunner
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: TecMagik
Release Date: Q1 1998
A mix of sim and arcade-style play, *Roto Gunner* is another helicopter-based game with a wide spectrum of military-based missions. This one could end up being the most sophisticated of the group.

Silicon Valley
Publisher: BMG
Developer: BMG
Release Date: Q1 1998
Silicon Valley is due to be a 3D RPG/Adventure featuring all sorts of high-tech skullduggery. This could be an interesting one.



Sim City
Publisher: Maxis
Developer: Maxis
Release Date: TBA
A game that works on pretty much any platform, *Sim City* is a title with real staying power and with the 3D capabilities of Nintendo 64 will probably be more convincing then ever. Plan a city from the ground up in one of the truly great strategy games of all time. What the Nintendo 64 will enable the developers at Maxis to do with this classic is yet to be seen and they're not saying much.

Sim City 2000
Publisher: Imagineer
Developer: Imagineer
Release date: TBA
Rumored to be in the growing list of 64DD titles, *Sim City* 2000 will make good use of the writable format with its intricacies and gameplay possibilities. It's still too early in development to guarantee any details, but the basic strategy formula should remain the same.

Legend of Zelda 64
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo
Release Date: Q3 '97
Another staple of the house that Miyamoto built, *Legend of Zelda 64* was set to be the flagship title for 64DD. Even with *Earthbound 64* possibly taking its place as the first 64DD game, *Zelda* will be an important test for the Nintendo 64 hardware and a welcome addition to the N64 library. An important game by any standards, *Zelda* is sure to be great on any system especially with Miyamoto giving it personal attention.

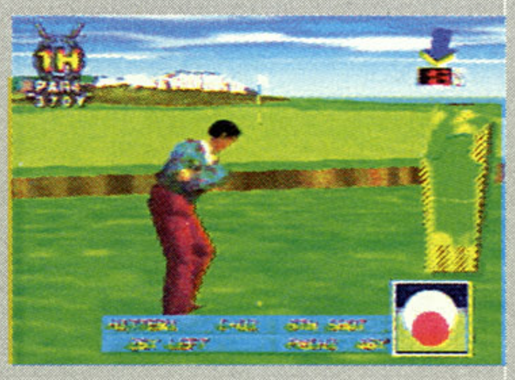


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Sonic Wings Assault
Publisher: Video System
Developer: Paradigm/ Video System
Release Date: Q2 '97 (Japan)
The creator of the impressive *PilotWings 64* and a little-known Japanese software developer have teamed up to create an action-packed flight experience. *Sonic Wings Assault* features some elements of a strict flight simulator, but maintains more of a focus on pure action gaming. Paradigm's military flight sim experience should help this game shine.



St. Andrews Golf
Publisher: Seta
Developer: Seta
Release Date: Available Now (Japan)
This unforgivably ugly golf sim, already out in Japan, benefits from unique analog control and an accurate rendition of the Royal and Ancient Gold course but it has little else to offer. In all, a poor example of a stilted genre.



Star Fox 64
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo
Release Date: TBA
Another long-awaited sequel, and possibly an apology for the ill-fated *StarFox 2* for SNES, *Star Fox 64* has been confirmed as the first Jolting Pack-compatible game for Nintendo 64, and will feature a four-player split-screen battle mode à la *Mario Kart 64*. Early looks at the game are already displaying some spectacular graphics and gameplay scenarios.



Mace: The Dark Ages
Publisher: Midway
Developer: Atari Games
Release Date: TBA
A gloriously detailed 3D fighting game with elements of *Soul Edge* and *War Gods*, *Mace* is well on its way to being the best 3D fighting game for Nintendo 64. Developed by Atari Coin-Op using hardware similar to Nintendo 64, the port promises to be simple and quick. *Mace*'s dark graphics and hard-core fighting style should help balance out the N64 library which is rapidly filling up with brightly colored *Mario*-esque action games.



Super Man 64
Publisher: Titus
Developer: Titus
Release Date: TBA
Based on the animated *Super Man* cartoon from Time Warner, this title will live or die not on the quality of its license, but on the amount of action it can deliver. If Titus is given free rein to make the game they want, it could shine. If the lawyers at Warner and Nintendo decide to make sure its firmly a "family" title, it will probably be dreadful.

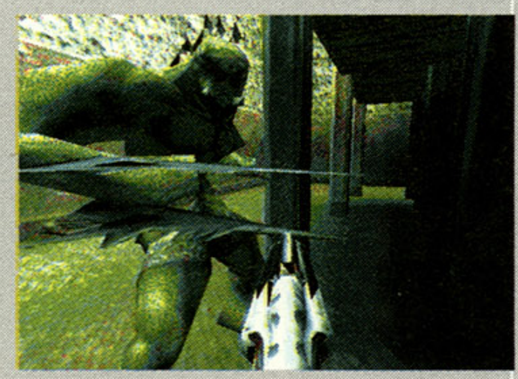
Super Mario RPG 2
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo
Release Date: TBA
The original Super NES game was programmed by Square, but the Nintendo 64 version will be handled, amid some controversy, by Nintendo in-house. Slated as a 64DD title, it should provide a satisfying in-road for younger RPG fans.

Tetrisphere
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: H2O
Release Date: TBA
The oft-delayed *Tetrisphere* is a testament to the tried and trusted gaming practice of flogging a dead horse. This time *Tetris* gets a spherical 3D appearance to distract you from the fact that it's not as much fun as the original. *Tetrisphere* first appeared on the Jaguar to mediocre reviews. It has yet to be seen what advances will be made for N64.

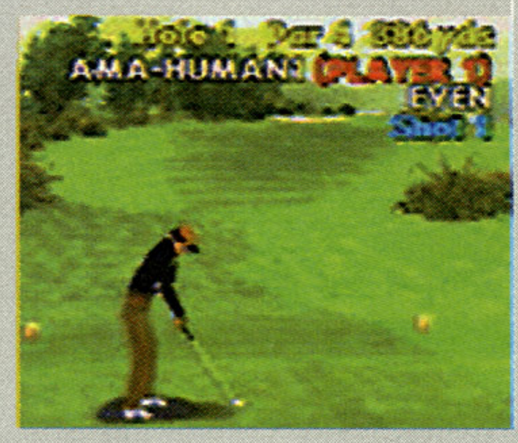
Top Gear Rally
Publisher: Kemko
Developer: Boss Games
Release Date: Q3 '97
Still waiting to be road tested, *Top Gear Rally* is to date, one of the most exciting examples of just what Nintendo 64 can do graphically. One of many off-road racing games in development for the system, *Top Gear Rally* could prove to be something special.



Unreal
Publisher: GT Interactive
Developer: Epic MegaGames/DMA Designs
Release Date: Q1 1998
Dubbed the *Quake*-killer, *Unreal* is another in a long list of first person shooters in development for Nintendo 64 and the second MMX based PC title to make its way to the console market via Nintendo. According to game developer, Epic MegaGames, Nintendo 64 is the only console system that can really accommodate this graphically wondrous shooter. It has yet to be confirmed whether the N64 version will feature the same amazing level editor made available for the PC but it will feature the same female heroine..



VR Golf (Actua Golf)
Publisher: Interplay
Developer: Gremlin
Release Date: Q4 '97
Continuing the VR Sports line, Interplay's golf game places polygonal golfers in exotic 3D locales. The game then proceeds to offer multiple gameplay options making this one of the most realistic games on the market. Motion-captured players play in tournaments and the analog joystick is used for swinging the clubs. Well received on PlayStation and Sega Saturn, the graphic capabilities of Nintendo 64 will only prove to enhance this already impressive game.

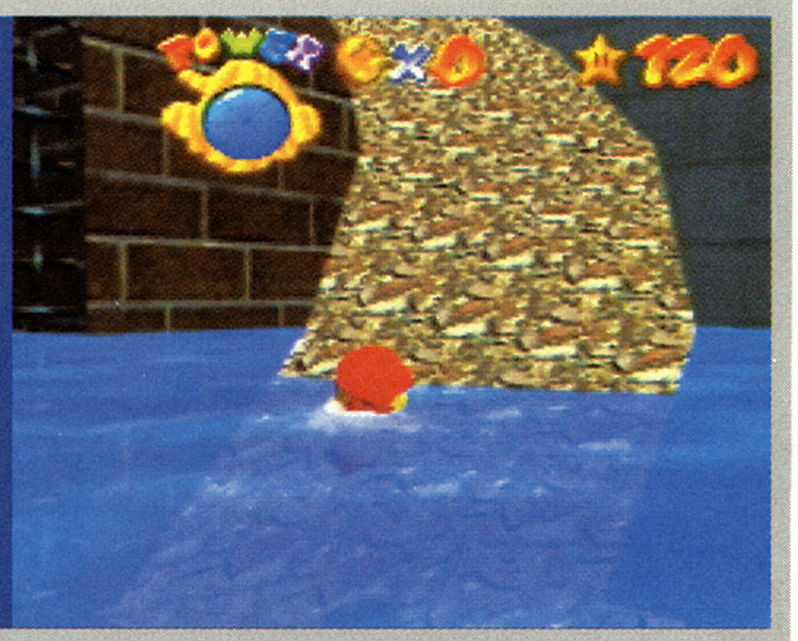


Mission Impossible
Publisher: Ocean Of America
Developer: Ocean
Release Date: TBA
Mission Impossible is a complex adventure game with puzzle elements and impressively intelligent bad guys. The game follows the movie plot very loosely which may be best since production delays have caused the game to miss the movie, video and pay per view release dates.
(See **NG 28**.)



Super Mario 2
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo
Release Date: Q4 1998

Work started on the second *Super Mario* game the instant the original was complete and it's rumored that the sequel will feature elements that didn't make it into the original, including the ability to ride *Mario*'s dinosaur friend, Yoshi and a playable Luigi. As expected, Nintendo is keeping a very tight lid on this one but with Miyamoto heading up the project it's easy to predict an incredible game.



War Gods
Publisher: Williams
Developer: Williams
Release Date: TBA

Arguably one of the most disappointing arcade fighters of recent memory, *War Gods* from Williams is as close to *Mortal Kombat 3D* as we're likely to get for a while (at least until the recently announced *Mortal Kombat 4* makes its first appearance) and for that we should be grateful. At any rate, porting the game should not be a problem and unless major changes are made to the game we will soon have the ultimate in mediocrity for Nintendo 64.

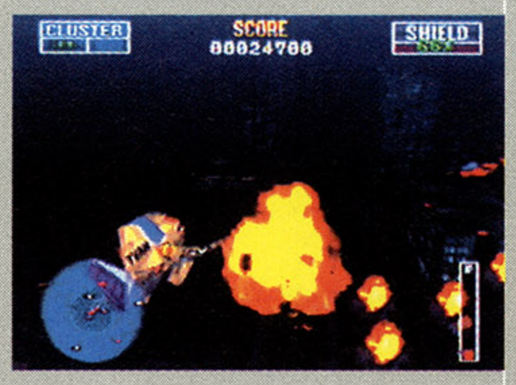


WCW Wrestling
Publisher: THQ
Developer: THQ
Release date: TBA

No game library is complete without a least one wrestling game and Nintendo 64 will be no exception. Expect all the colorful faces that come with the WCW license to make an appearance in this the first, but probably not the last, 64-bit wrestling game.

Wild Choppers
Publisher: Seta
Developer: Seta
Release Date: TBA

A 3D, combat arcade game from Japanese journeymen Seta, *Wild Choppers* features a promising two player split-screen mode. More action than sim, this is one for shooter fans not would-be chopper pilots.



Wonder Project J2
Publisher: Enix
Developer: Giburo/Mint
Release Date: Q1 '97 (Japan)

It's not likely that we'll ever see a U.S. release for this one, but if you like anime style graphics, twisted adventure gaming, and a little bit of that bizarre Japanese humor *Wonder Project J2* just may be the import for you.



Yuke Yuke Troublemakers
Publisher: Enix
Developer: Treasure
Release Date: Q2 '97

Imaginative graphics enhance this conventional 3D shooter. Being developed by ex-Konami programmers, Treasure, the game displays a similar look to the explosive shooter, *Gunstar Heroes*. Clever visual effects and animation are the order of the day when Treasure is involved.



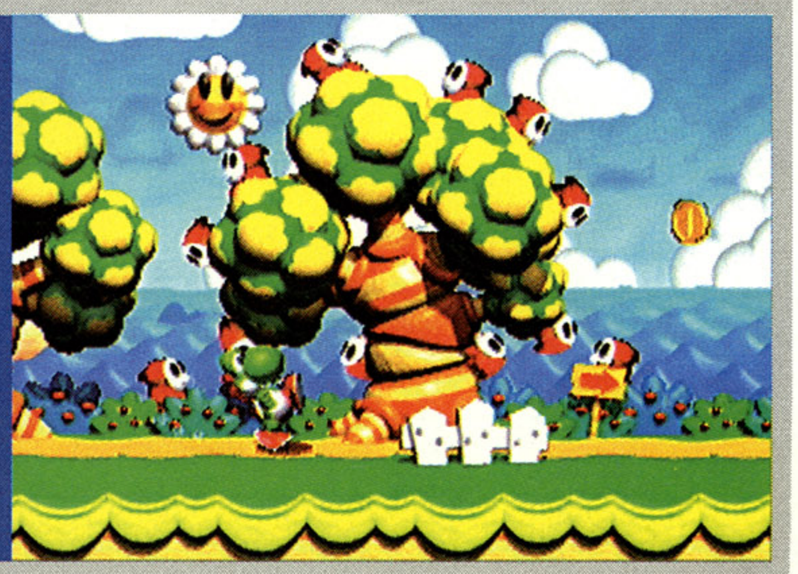
In Conclusion

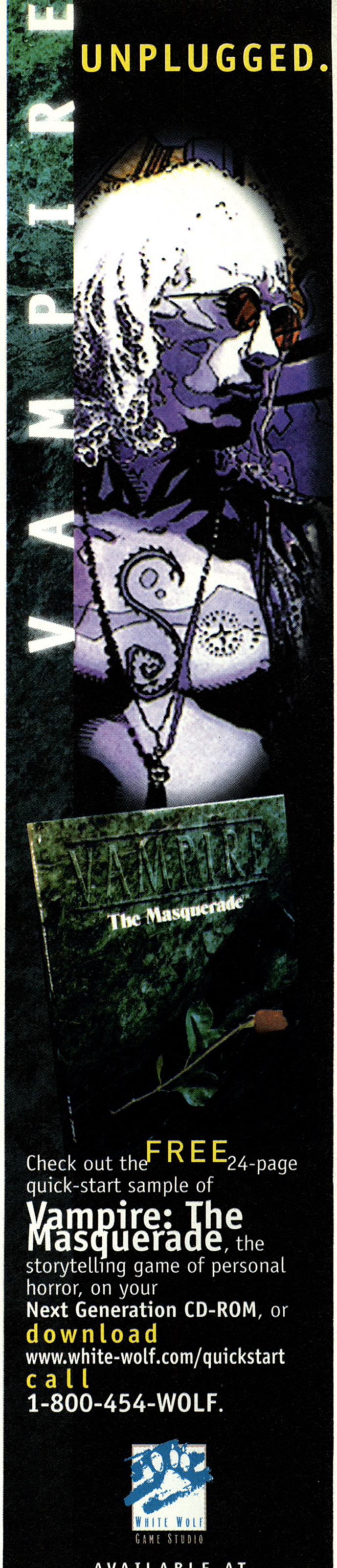
So, what will all these upcoming titles mean to the future of Nintendo 64? Everything. As the newness of the system starts to wear thin it will be these, the second round of games, that really tell gamers what the system is all about. Marketing dollars and hype can take a product only so far, after all. And if Nintendo 64 is going to continue to shine in the marketplace it will have to do it with this software.

ng

Yoshi's Island 64
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo
Release Date: TBA

A follow-up to the *Mario*-esque *Yoshi's Island* for SNES, *Yoshi's Island 64* will be the first true test for the 2D capabilities of Nintendo 64. To date, *Yoshi's Island 64* already features some of the lushest environments seen yet on the platform. With Miyamoto at the helm, *YI64* will, no doubt, feature imaginative worlds and gameplay of the first-order.





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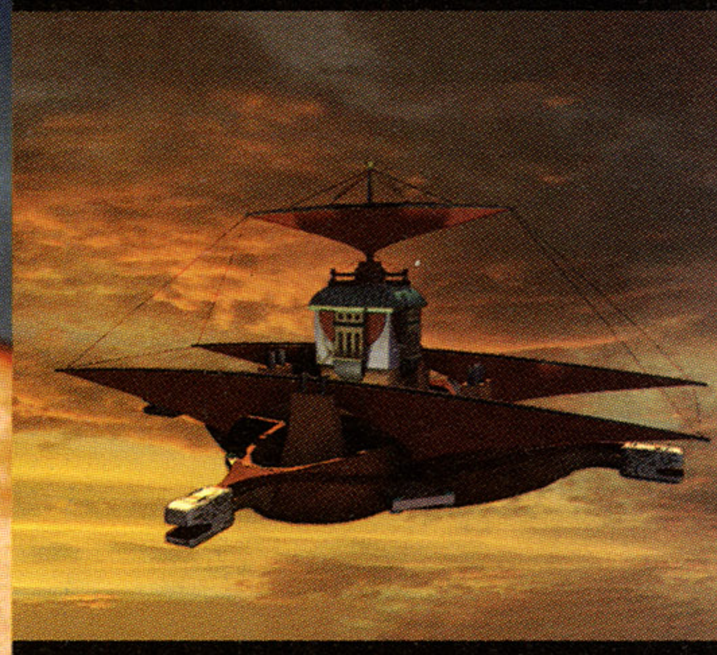
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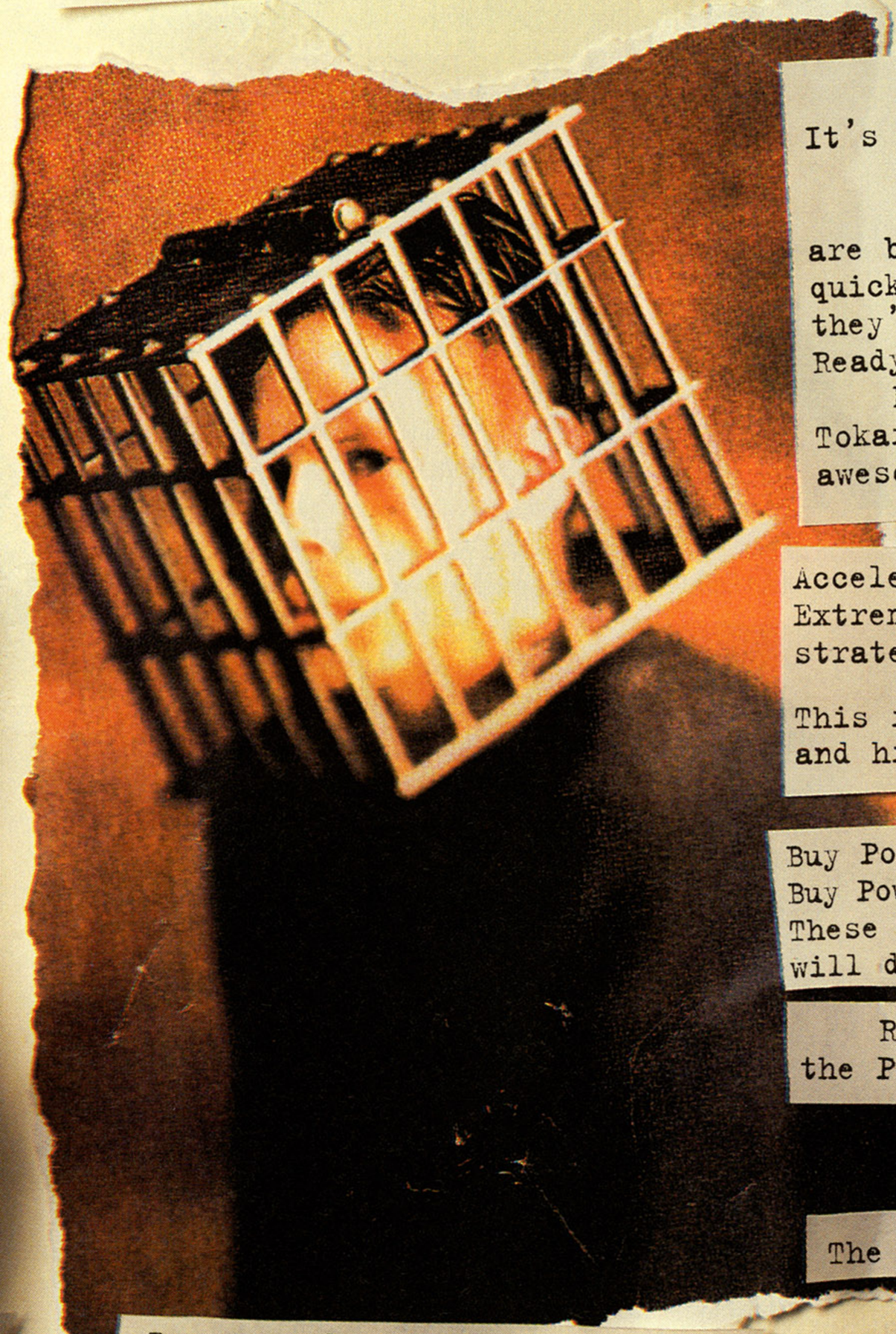
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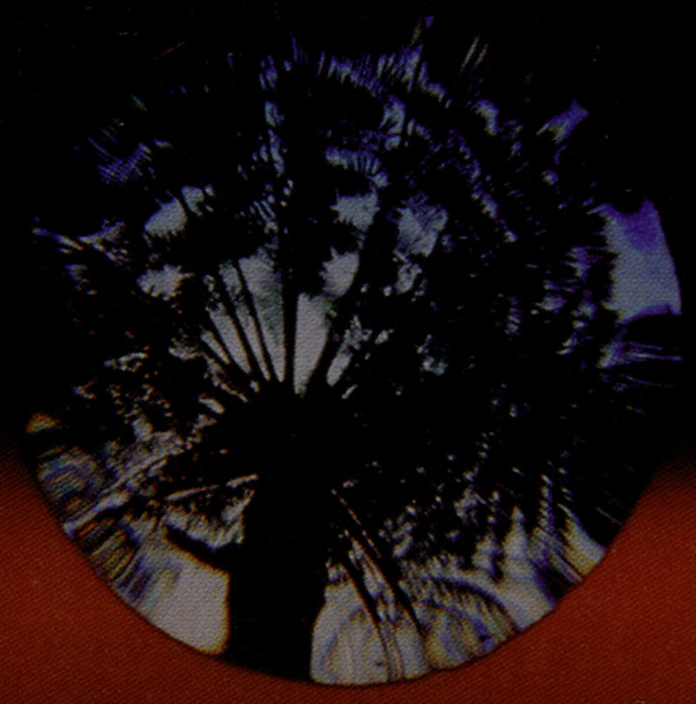
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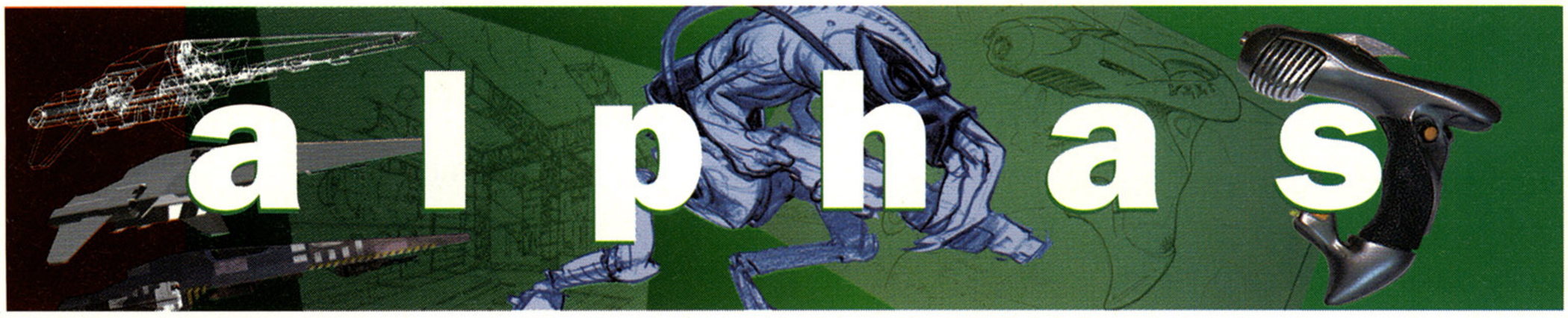


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Farm fresh previews bursting with protein

May presents us with games from a variety of genres for a variety of systems (even including M2). However, a theme to this month's Alphas seems to be racing. We reveal several top racers for '97: *Grand Prix Legends*, *Manx TT*, *Top Gear Rally*, and the innovative *Runabout*. Also, the ball's in play with Sega's startlingly realistic *Virtua Striker 2* and the first U.S. pro soccer game, *Major League Soccer* by Z-Axis.

66 Grand Prix Legends **PC**
Papyrus captures 60's era racing in this sim

72 Power Crystal **M2**
M2's first RPG boasts a living world

79 Captives **PC**
A *Choplifter* and *Lemmings* combination?

83 European Air War **PC**
WW2 pilots take flight again in this sim

88 Top Gear Rally **NINTENDO 64**
Boss Games may salvage N64 auto racing

91 Creatures **PC**
Millenium gives birth to artificial life

95 688(I) Hunter Killer **PC**
Military sub specialists go down for EA

98 Virtua Striker 2 **ARCADE**
AM2 brings soccer to Model 3 hardware

103 Manx TT **SATURN, PC**
The arcade bike racer screams homeward

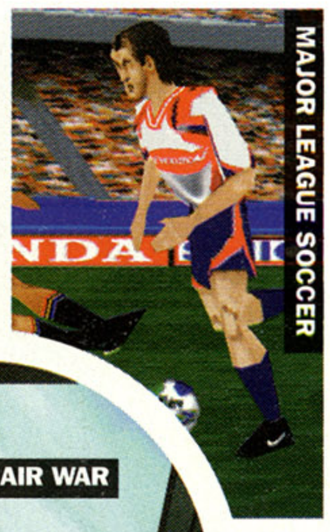
108 House of the Dead **ARCADE**
A lightgun game with zombies, and a story?

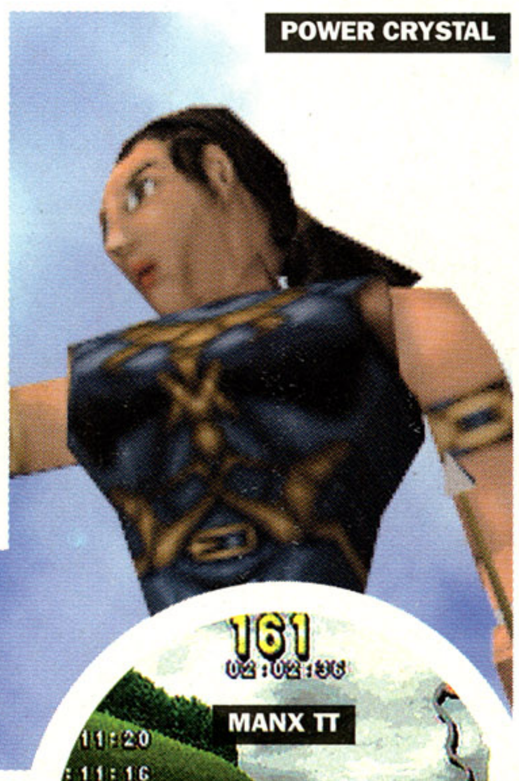
115 Runabout **PLAYSTATION**
Drive anywhere — through everything

120 Innerloop
Norway developers break new 3D ground

126 Major League Soccer **PC**
From the first ever "sports-only" developer







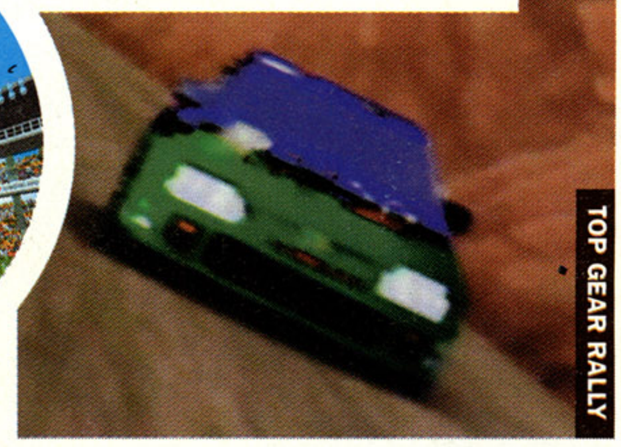




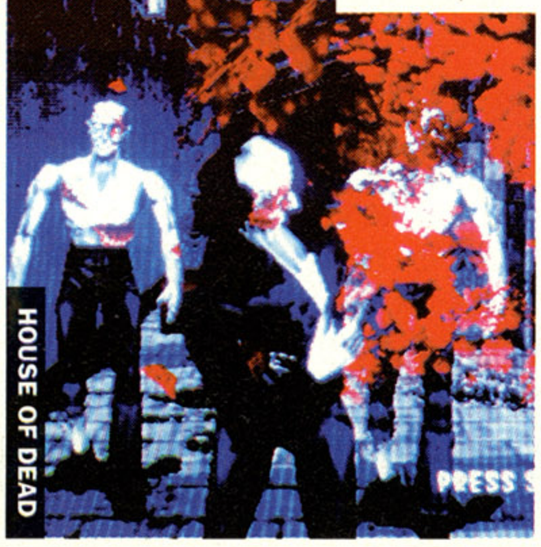


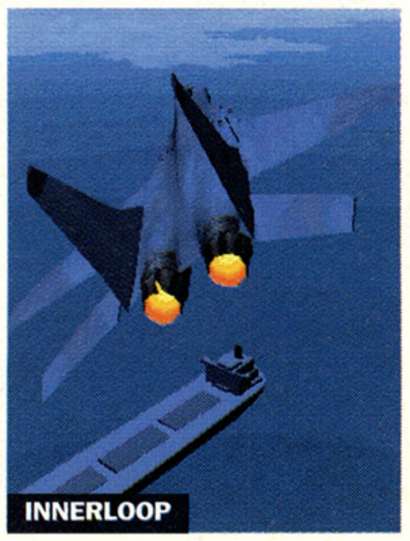










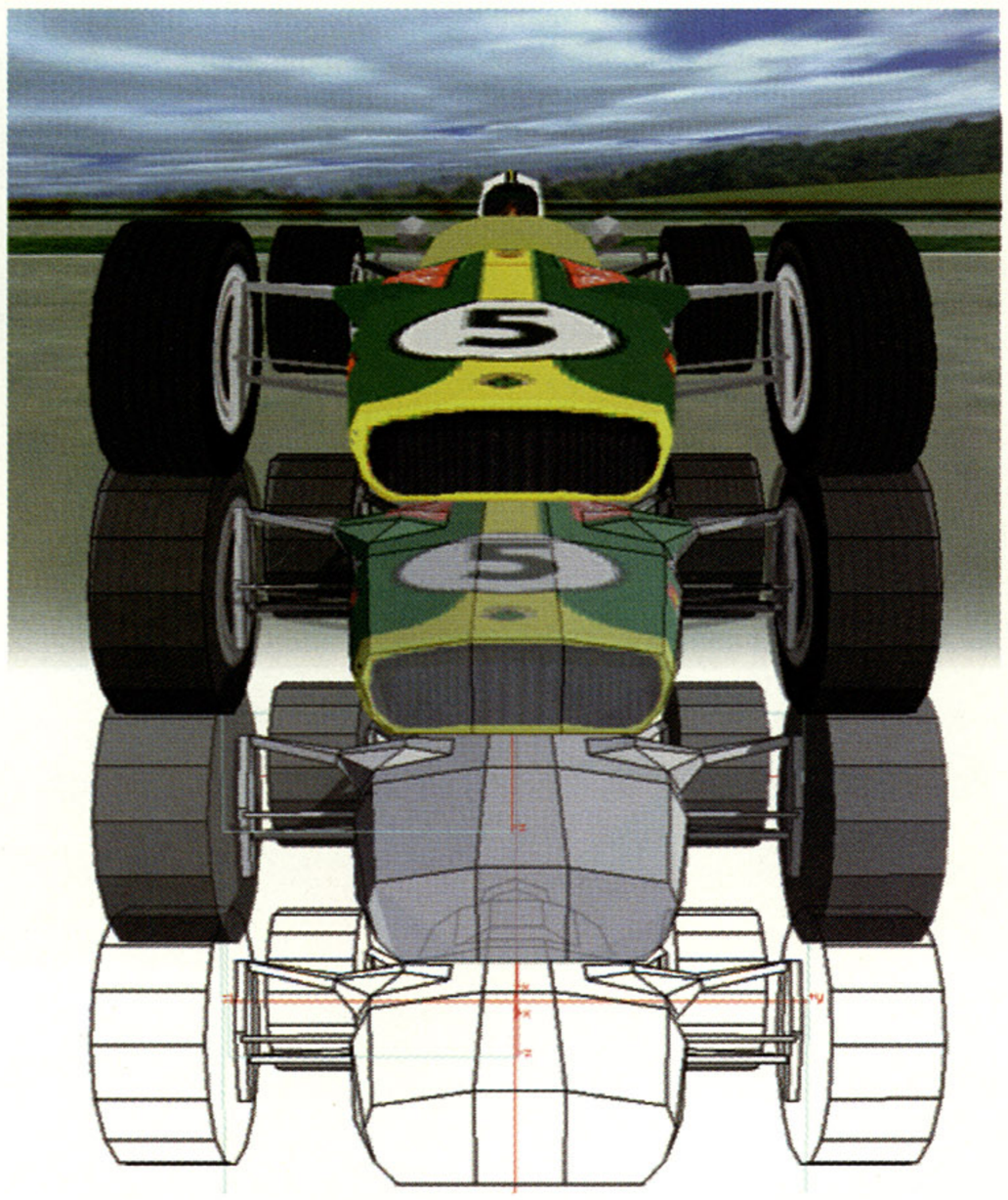


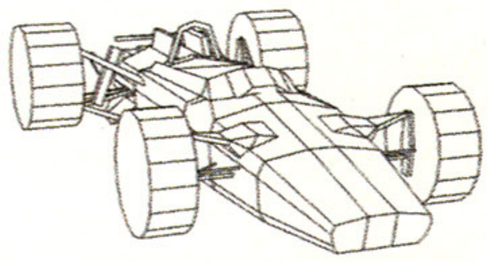
No pit stops for Papyrus as its latest sim returns to the glory days of Formula racing

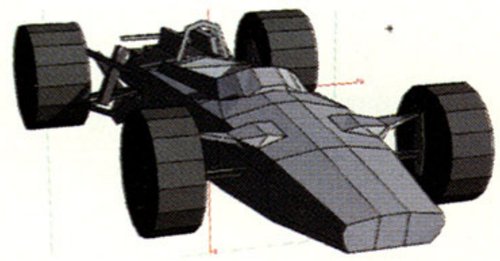
Grand Prix Legends



Cars were not required to meet the same specs back in 1967, so each car handled differently. To simulate this, Papyrus is creating totally different 3D models for each car, each with its own style of performance







The car designs were not as elaborate as today's formulas, so Papyrus can recreate them with a fairly low polygon count, roughly 400 polygons per car. Note the detailed suspension between the wheels and chassis

Format: **PC CD-ROM**
Publisher: **Sierra**
Developer: **Papyrus**
Release Date: **Fall 1997**
Origin: **U.S.**

Just catch a glimpse of John Frankenheimer's classic film *Grand Prix*, and you'll immediately understand why it is the inspiration for Papyrus's *Grand Prix Legends*. Based on the 1967 Grand Prix circuit, this sim looks to capture what is regarded as the most romantic, and deadliest, period of Formula 1 racing.

"Racing in the '60s," says Papyrus co-founder and chief technology officer Dave Kaemmer, "was largely on tracks that were unbelievably dangerous by today's standards. The tracks were narrow and lined with trees, houses, and people. Plus, cars couldn't skid off into track. Generally, if you left the track, there was going to be a big accident."

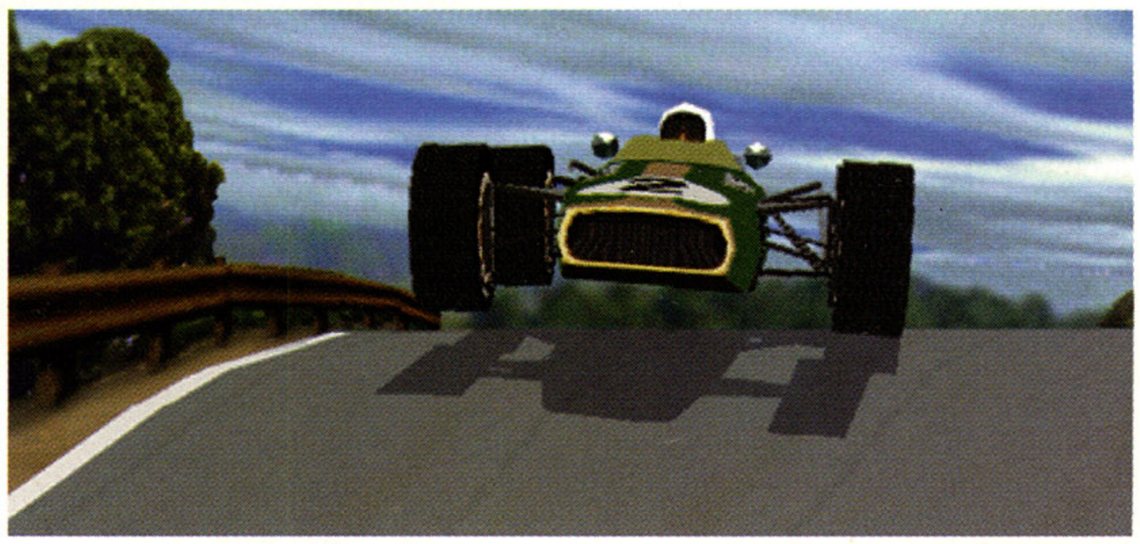
"Racing in the 60's was unbelievably dangerous by today's standards"

Dave Kaemmer, Co-founder

The more one looks at that racing era, the easier it is to understand how it translates to a powerful gaming experience. The *Grand Prix Legends* team realized that in modern racing sims, like Papyrus's own *NASCAR* and *IndyCar* series, the background environment is set away from the track and doesn't give the player a strong a sense of speed because everything is far away. *Grand Prix Legends*, with its narrow roads, elevation changes, and close-in scenery, captures the danger that has only been found in arcade-style street racing games like *Need For Speed* and *Screamer*.

Unlike most modern, oval-shaped tracks, the closed road courses of the



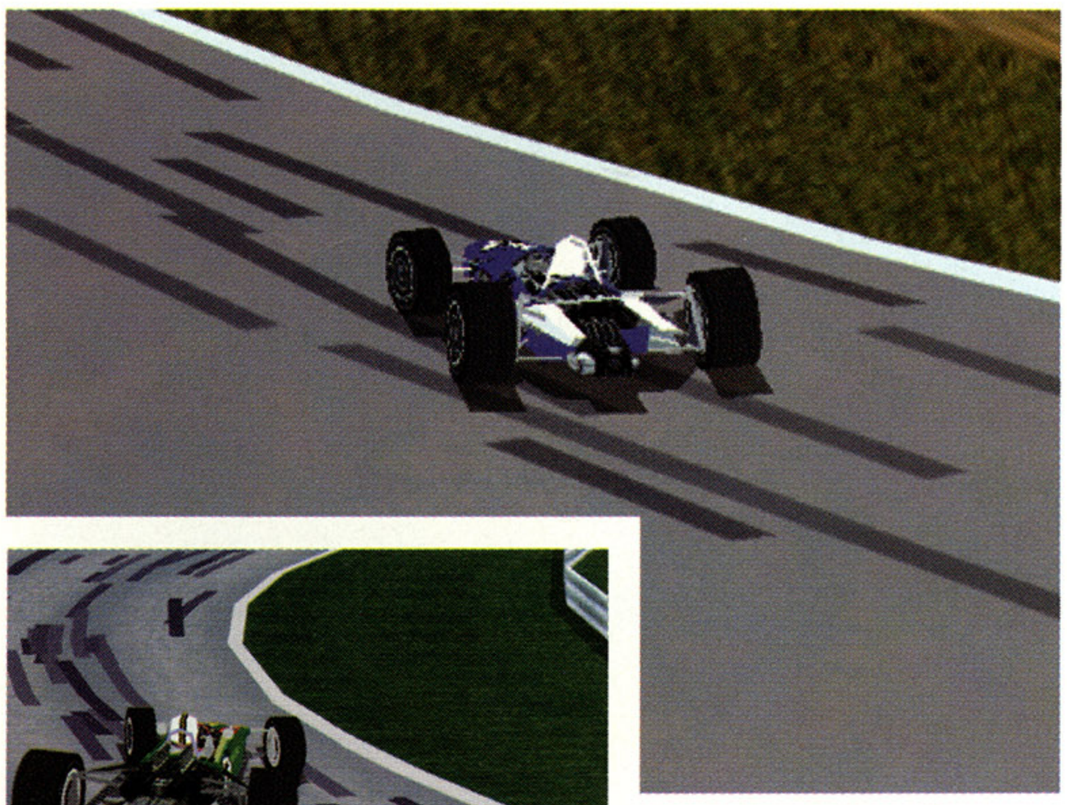


Grand Prix Legends **features extremely advanced physics. Often only one or two wheels will leave the ground (right). In arcade-style racers like *Destruction Derby 2*, cars are either on or off the ground**

'67 circuit offer a greater challenge, leaving the player little margin for error. Indy car drivers back in the 1960's didn't wear harnesses, primarily because they wanted out of crashes in a hurry. As there were no refueling pit-stops, the cars carried 75 gallons of gas and had extremely explosive fuel cells. Kaemmer mentions that more often than not crashes ended in fiery explosions; he says he's seen some very disturbing footage from the era when drivers were actually thrown from their vehicles.

A gory arcade racer is the last thing Papyrus intends to create, after having spent years developing the top-branded *NASCAR* and *IndyCar* sims. Kaemmer has put a lot of thought into racing technology and believes that modern racing games wouldn't be a great initial test-bed for the real physics his team is bringing to *Grand Prix Legends*. "Modern cars are very stiffly sprung," he says. "They don't really show what's going on physically with the car. Plus they have a lot of air cam downforce that even masks some of the feel from the car. We decided to do a game with older cars, softer springs and no downforce. So you can see the cars bouncing, and on several of the circuits, one track in particular, they get airborne in several places."

More often than not, crashes ended in fiery explosions

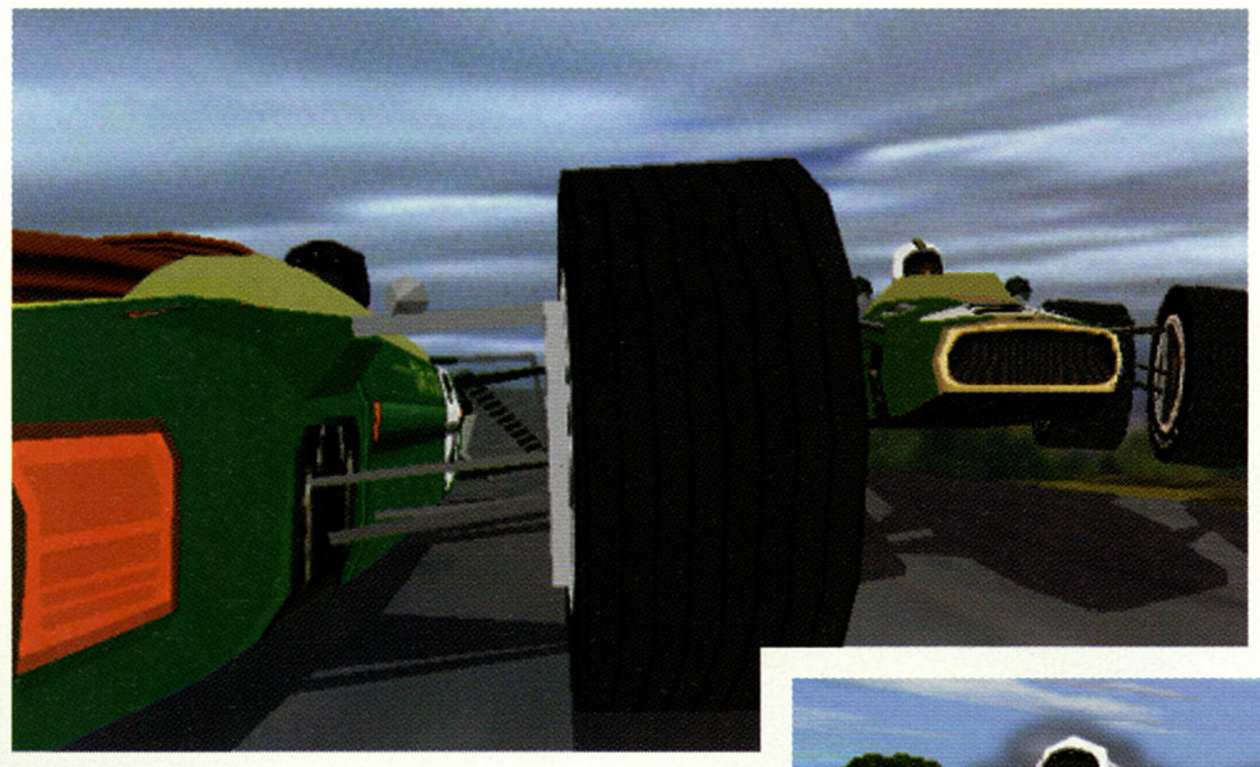


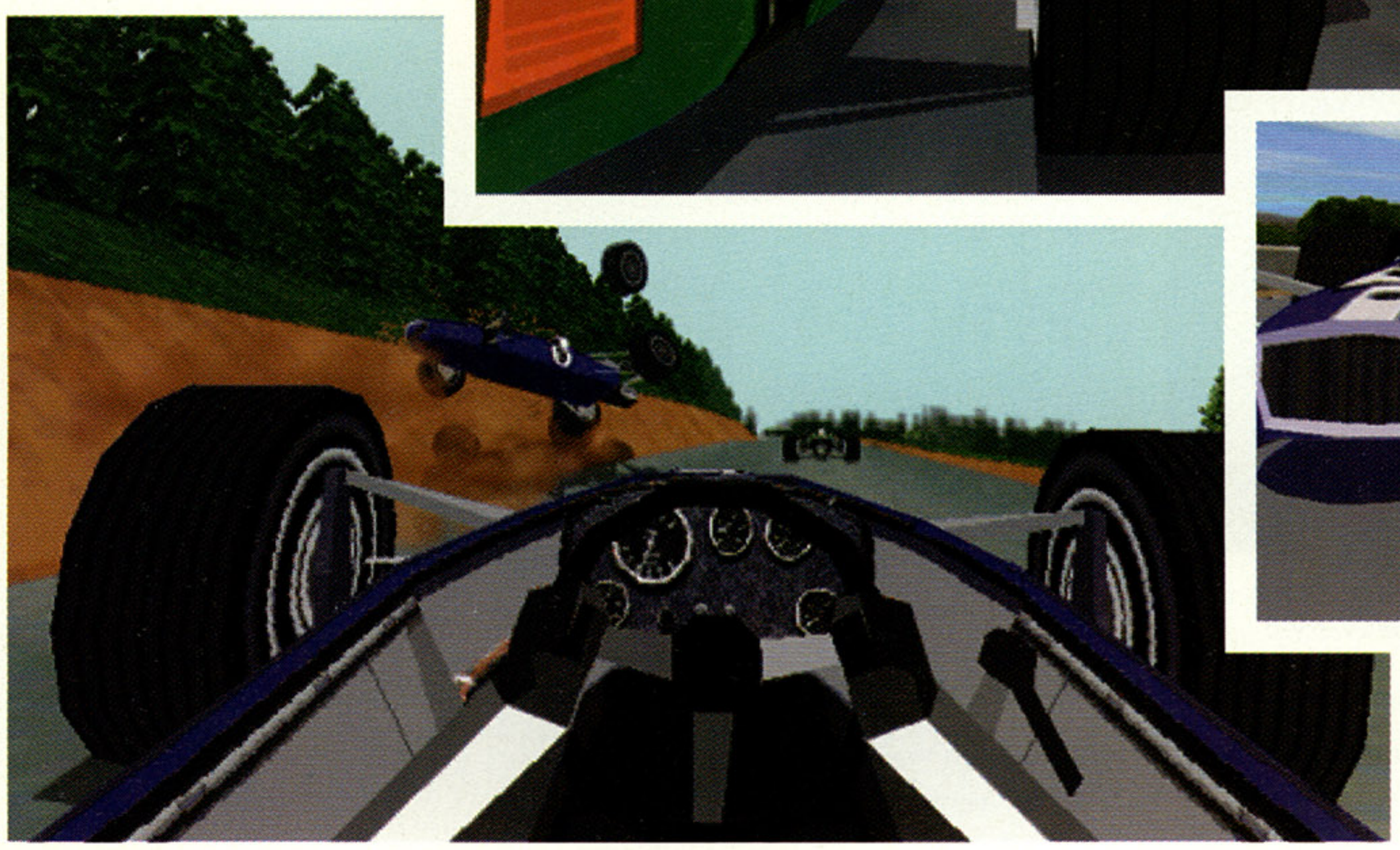
With the unique physics model, cornering becomes a new experience, as the game simulates the rough back-end slide of the cars

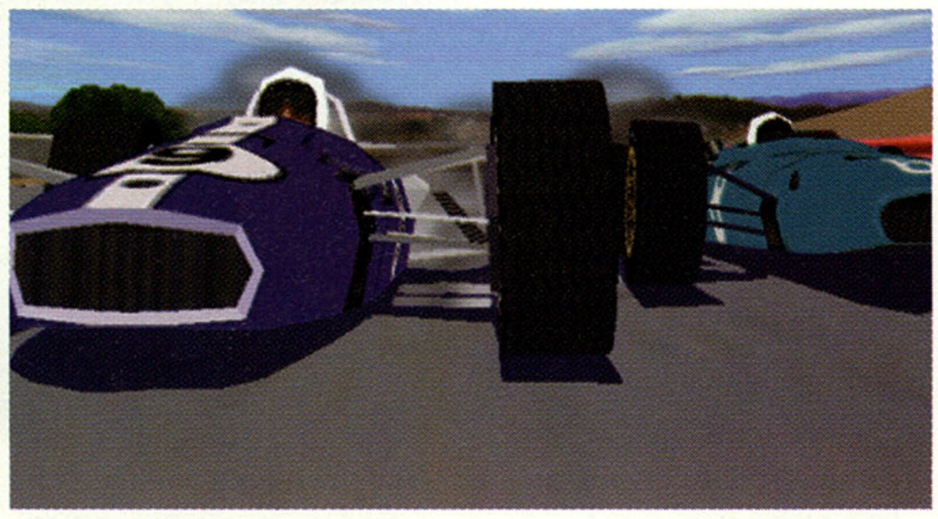
The new physics model, according to project producer Matt Sentell, will surely supersede anything currently on the market. "It's truly 3D all the time," says Sentell with a noticeably fading Southern accent. "So what can happen is that one wheel can leave the ground. Most games only distinguish the car being on the track, or completely off the track, instead of true 3D physics being applied."

Kaemmer, the sim-minded man

ng alphas







Most of the 11 tracks represent tracks raced during the '67 season. Others were added, however, because they were fun courses. Courses include Italy's Monza, Holland's Zandvoort, USA's Watkins Glen, and Canada's Mosport

behind all of Papyrus's racing technology, set out to create the most realistic 3D physics system he could and has spent over a year perfecting it. "We are modeling everything," he says evenly, "right down to gyroscopic torques. So when you jump the car, if you turn the steering wheel, it will make the thing start to turn, just like a real car."

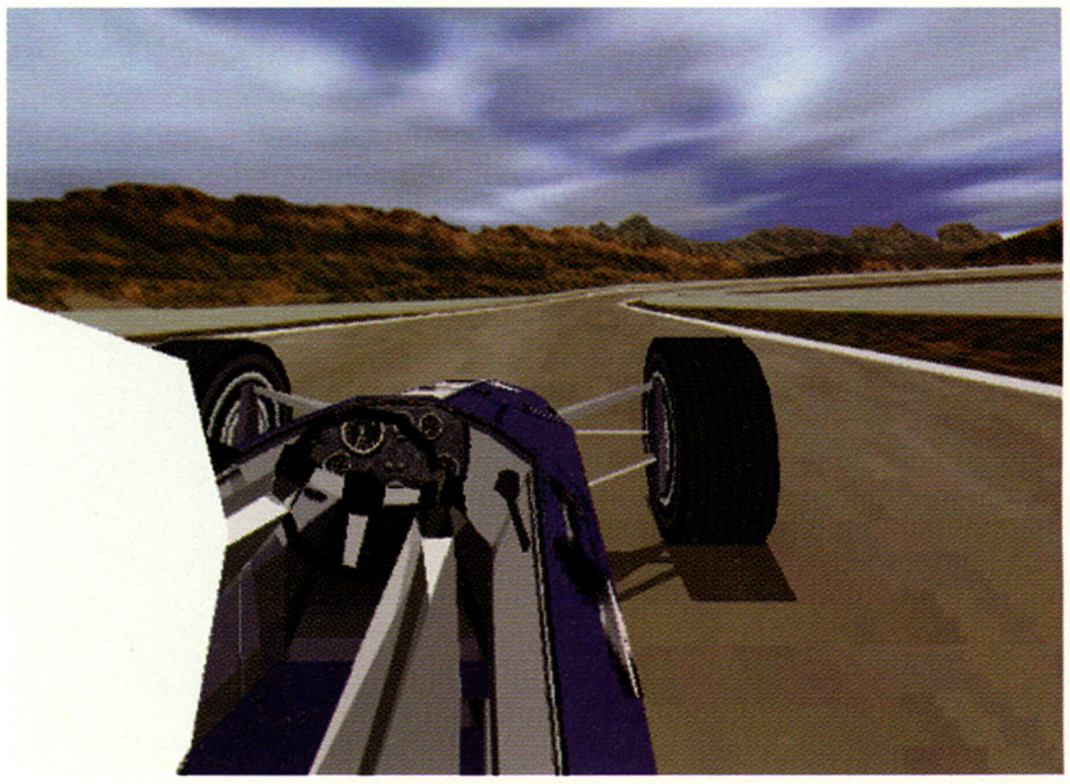
"We are modeling everything, right down to gyroscopic torques"

Dave Kaemmer, Co-founder

So why sim the 1967 season, and what makes it the end of the so-called romantic period of Formula One? Sentell explains that there are several reasons. "During '68 and '69 the wings came in on the cars, and the corporate sponsorship really got started. Before 1967, the cars were much less powerful, lacked grip, and just weren't as fast." The Papyrus team wanted fast, powerful cars and high-powered weight ratios, but not the modern aerodynamics and wings. "If you look back," Sentell says jokingly, "and ask at what point in racing history were the cars absolutely the most dangerous to drive, it was probably 1967."

Of course, *Grand Prix Legends* will also include the sim elements traditionally found in Papyrus racing products. The game will consist of 11 tracks, most of which are European, but there are also tracks in the U.S., Mexico, South Africa, and Canada. "It's patterned after the '67 season," Sentell says, "with just a couple of exceptions to make the game more fun."

Because it's been 30 years since the '67 season, licensing has been something of a nightmare for Papyrus — it had to track down and get the



These cars didn't have to make pit stops like modern Formula or IndyCar vehicles, so do not expect to make them in the game. Cars available include the Lotus 49, the Brabham BT-24, and the Gurney Eagle

rights to the names of the actual drivers who ran the circuit that year. "It's not a pleasant thing," Kaemmer says, "to call someone on the phone and say that you want license their dead son's name, but people have been very helpful."

Also, many tracks that the designers plan to re-create no longer exist in their original form. During roadtrips to Europe, the team visited several town halls to get the blueprints for tracks that had since gone bankrupt.

"It's not a pleasant thing to call someone on the phone and say that you want to license their dead son's name"

David Kaemmer, Co-founder

Kaemmer started Papyrus back in '89 with *Indy 500* for Electronic Arts. With the advent of more powerful processors (*Indy 500* ran on a 286), Kaemmer has created incrementally better racing titles. "There have been a lot of improvements in the artwork," he says in reference to Papyrus's last few projects. "But as far physics goes, this is entirely new."

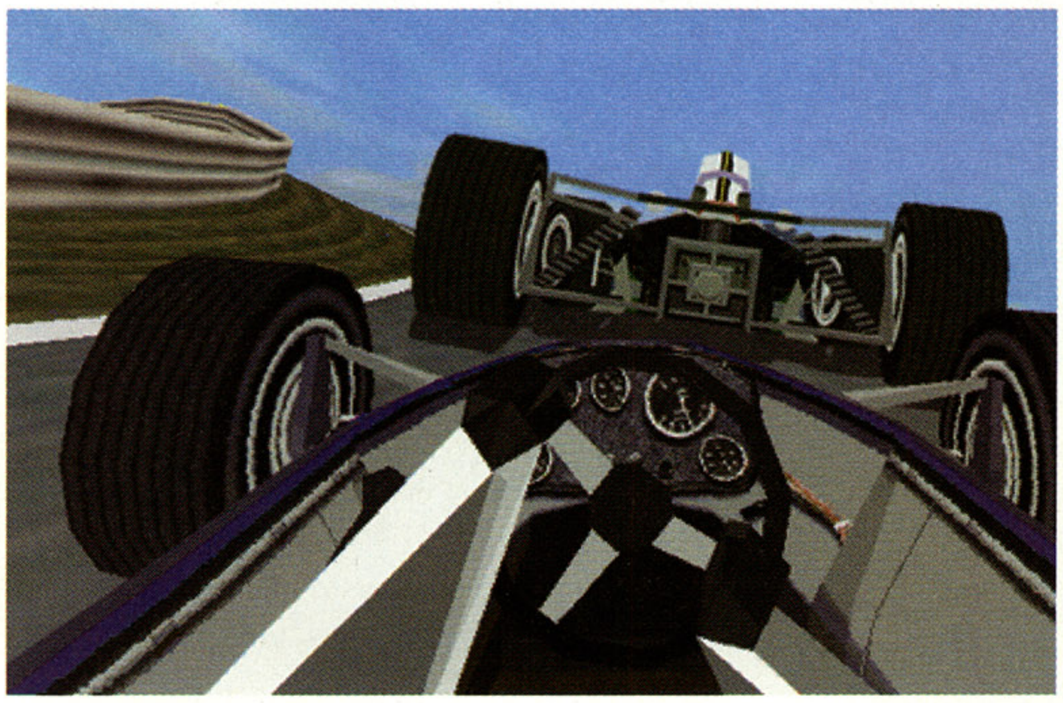
Like any other resourceful game developer, Papyrus has traditionally recycled code from its previous releases. "We always carry code forward from one thing to the next," Kaemmer says, noting that the user interface is based on the one used in *NASCAR 2*. "But for this title," he pauses, "we're building a new engine to support up to eight network players."

For the level of realism the Papyrus team intends to bring to the game, a new physics model was required to get the kind of gameplay they wanted. "The drivers back then slid the cars around a lot more," says Sentell. "They spent a lot of time on opposite lock, steering away from the turn because the back end of the car is sliding around the corner. The new physics engine really enables us to simulate this." While this style of driving is surely a departure from the current Papyrus lineup, Sentell ensures **Next Generation** that once players get the hang of it, "it is truly a blast."

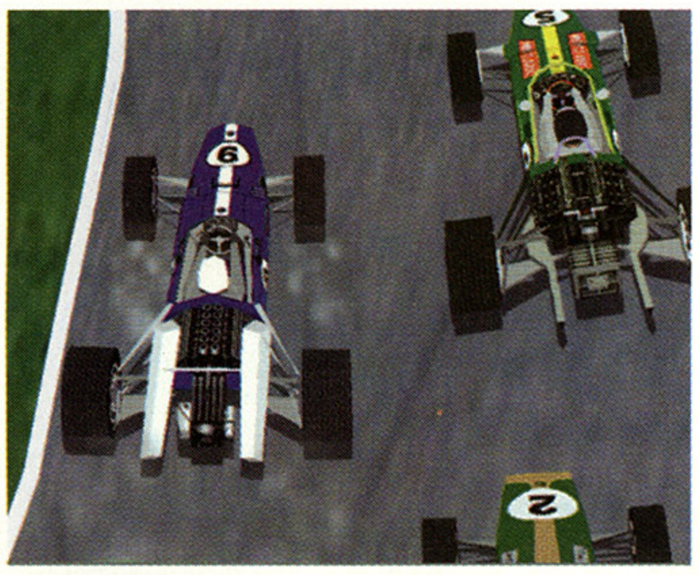
Papyrus is shooting for 16-bit, 640-by-480 graphics, and it's going to maximize support for 3D accelerator cards. Kaemmer and Sentell expect that a minimum of a P90 will be required to run the game. At press time, the game was nearing 50% complete and the track designs were still coming together.

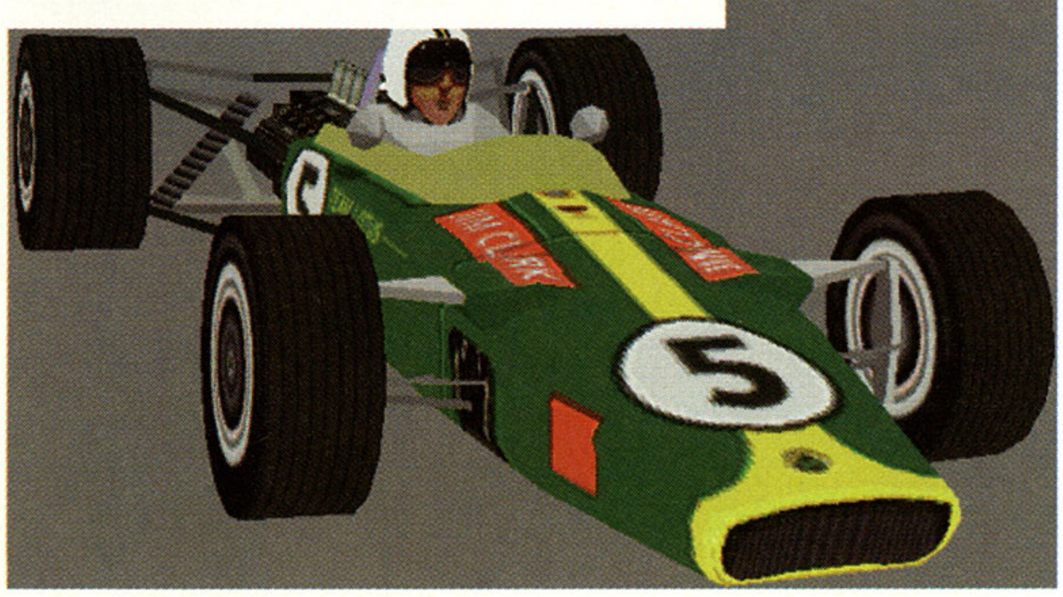
Though the game is still in early development, Papyrus will evidently again take the PC racing cultists to a new threshold of speed. But more importantly, this title may have the ability to recreate a poignant period in the sport. It has the potential to capture an ephemeral year of greatness, long ago, before race cars became motor oil billboards moving at 200mph. ng





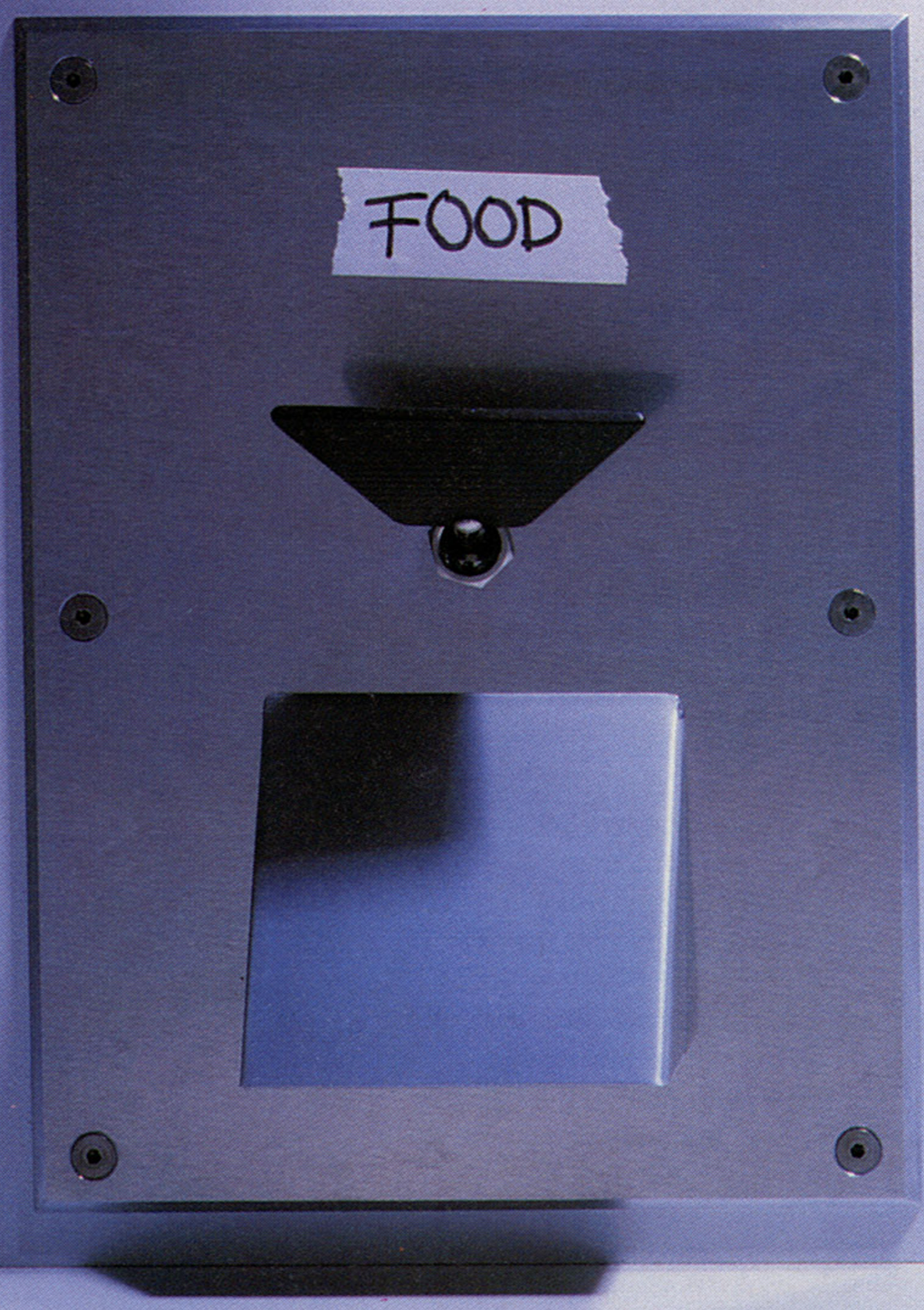
Approximately 20 cars will participate in each race. There are several selectable views, including a cockpit view (above). The physics are so detailed that players will see the shake of other driver's helmets

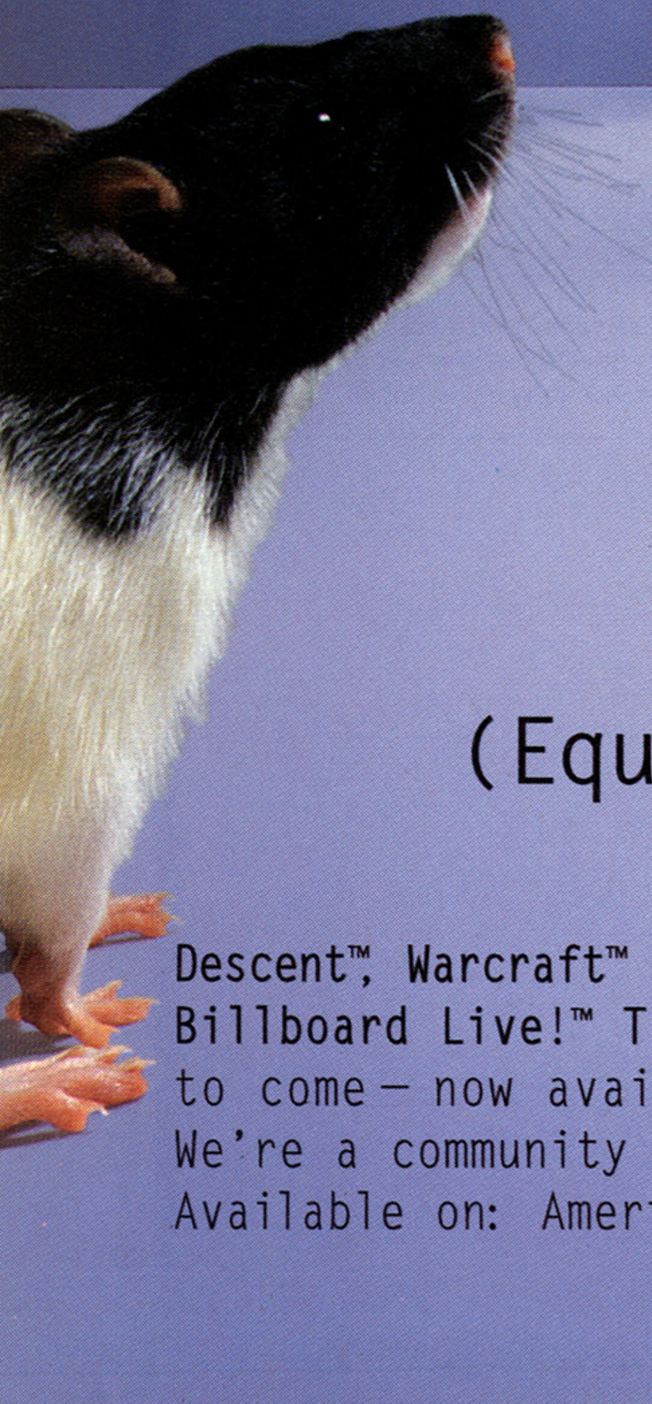




Papyrus has licensed the names of the drivers of the era, including "legends" like Jim Clark, Jack Brabham, and Dan Gurney, among others

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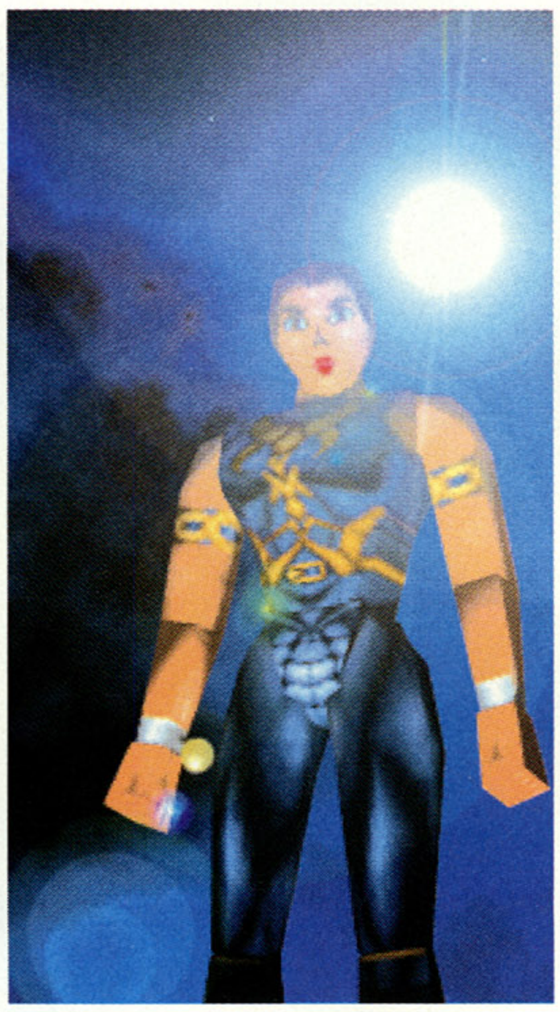
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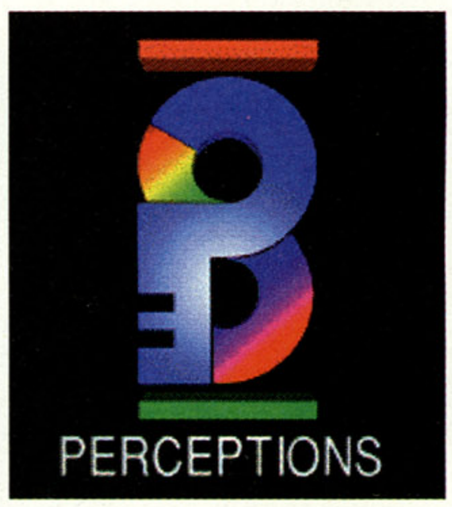
Power Crystal

As new technology brings greater freedom to developers, an ambitious 3D adventure is set to show the videogame world what Matsushita's 64-bit M2 can really do for gameplay











Perceptions's Andrew Whittaker began tinkering with a ZX81 in 1981 before moving into game programming

These shots are taken directly from the game but have been rendered in 3D Studio with the same number of polygons. Some of the game's enemies (top, left) are most definitely not human

Format: **M2**
Publisher: **TBA**
Developer: **Perceptions**
Release Date: **TBA**
Origin: **U.K.**

Hull is a fishing town in the north of England that constantly seems to be cold, wet, and extraordinarily windy. None of this appears to bother Andrew Whittaker, the 29-year-old co-founder and C.E.O. of Perceptions. "I really love our office," he explains earnestly. "It's one of the best working environments. It's great coming to work and being so close to scenic country and the river."

His enthusiasm is understandable. Hull may seem like a strange place, but on visiting Perceptions offices, it's clear why the place is liked so much. The sea is nearby, and the magnificent Humber Bridge is visible from the windows — a sight guaranteed to relax even the most frustrated programmers.

Perceptions was founded in 1995 by Andrew Whittaker, Andrew Noble, Dave Lago, and Tan Cheng Im. As Whittaker explains, "Each of us had experience in the computer industry, and we all decided to get more involved with designing gameplay-orientated products." During the months that followed the start-up, Perceptions began

"We were proud to be approached to work on M2. It's great to be the first with such stunning hardware

Andrew Whittaker, Perceptions



The Perceptions team braves Hull's less-than-glorious climes in the brave way only gamers can

looking to recruit videogame talent. The group had one imperative. "It was a criteria that every member have a significant title under their belt," explains Whittaker. This is slightly ironic considering the origins of two Perceptions founders, Dave Lago and Tan Cheng Im. Lago, now financial director and 3D programmer, previously worked on computer projects at Barclays Bank, while Cheng Im is a professor and expert in virtual reality. She still lectures around the world in universities and consults the firm.

Eventually, the group took on six staff and then placed a recruitment ad in *Edge*, Next Generation's European sibling publication. After a healthy response, two more people were hired.

Power Crystal began when 3DO approached Perceptions and asked if the team would like to get involved with M2. Whittaker already had the actual game concept in mind. As he explains, "*Power Crystal* is a game I've always wanted to write. I developed an interest in large landscape strategy games after working with Mike Singleton and have had the idea for this huge RPG for a long time. I had to wait for a machine that could achieve my expectations. We wanted to add continual excitement for the player — not just a landscape romp — and it takes a lot of processing power to keep all the characters, buildings, puzzles, and objects in the world. With the M2, we've realized that aim to the extent where there is literally something around every corner."

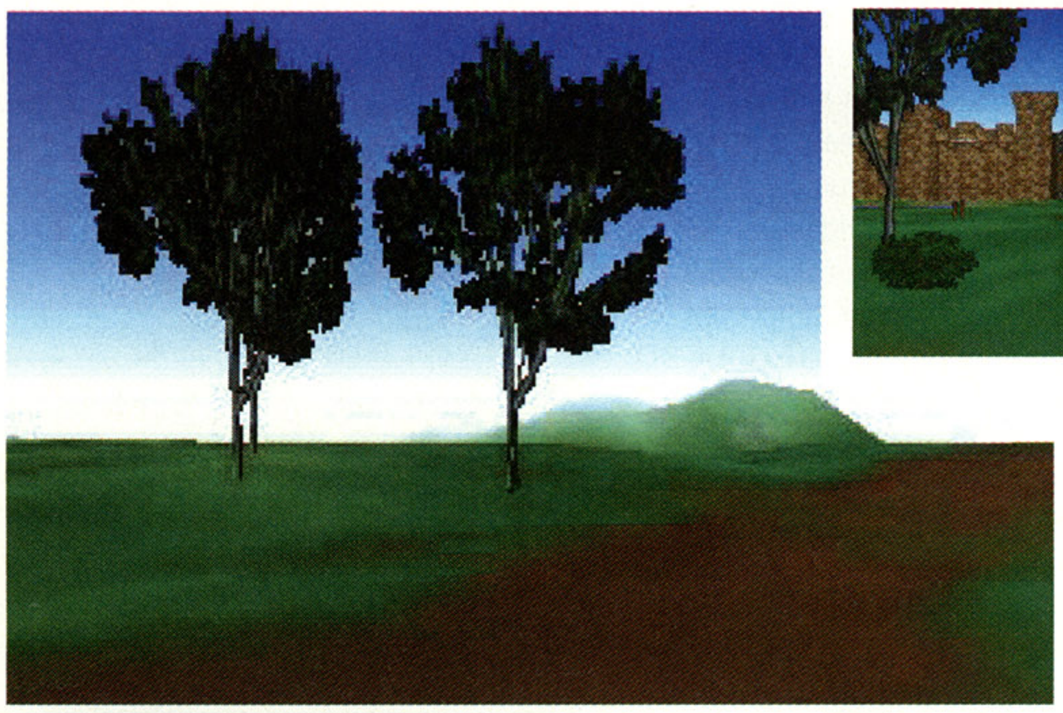
Perceptions was apparently an early choice as an M2 developer because of its track record and because Whittaker's Jaguar game, *Alien Vs. Predator*, was one of 3DO's favorite titles. Whittaker's team was delighted at the prospect of working with the Matsushita's M2 format: "Being approached by 3DO is an offer of which we are very proud. It was great to be first on the block with such stunning new hardware."

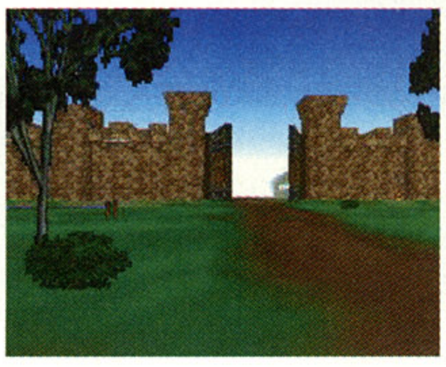
At the moment, the company has an M2 card plugged into the back of an Apple Macintosh along with several Pentium 166Mhz machines networked around the office. The initial learning curve of the M2 is apparently quite long, and the team says they spent around six months perfecting their skills. Once mastered, however, Whittaker insists that it's a programmer's dream. The majority of *Power Crystal* is being created in C using M2's own compiler, while the polygon graphics are created using 3D Studio and 3D Studio Max. The only part of the game written in assembly language is a small section of the 3D engine, though even that is mostly in C.

Power Crystal itself looks set to be a unique RPG title. The whole thing takes place in a full 3D environment, in real time, and the player can walk around and interact with other characters — the idea being to simulate a real, living world. Plus, as Whittaker explains,

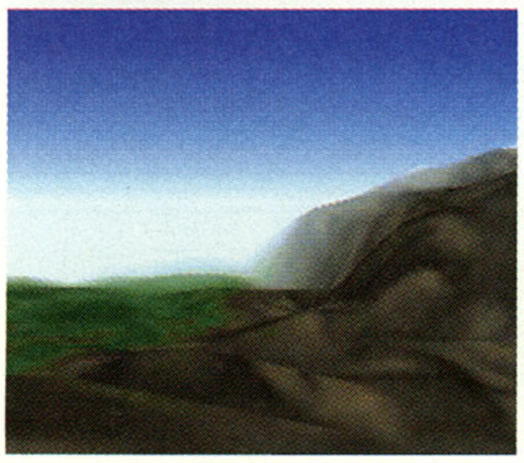
"*Power Crystal* is a game I've always wanted to write"

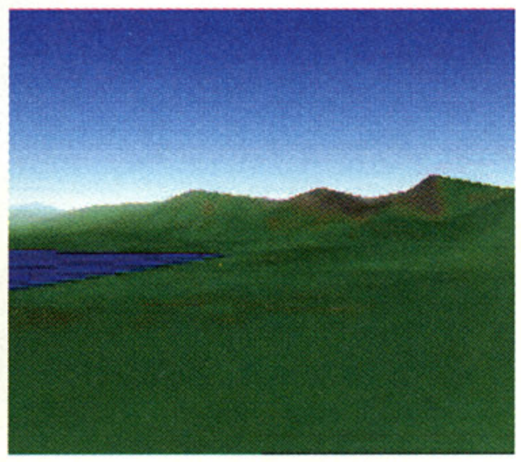
Andrew Whittaker





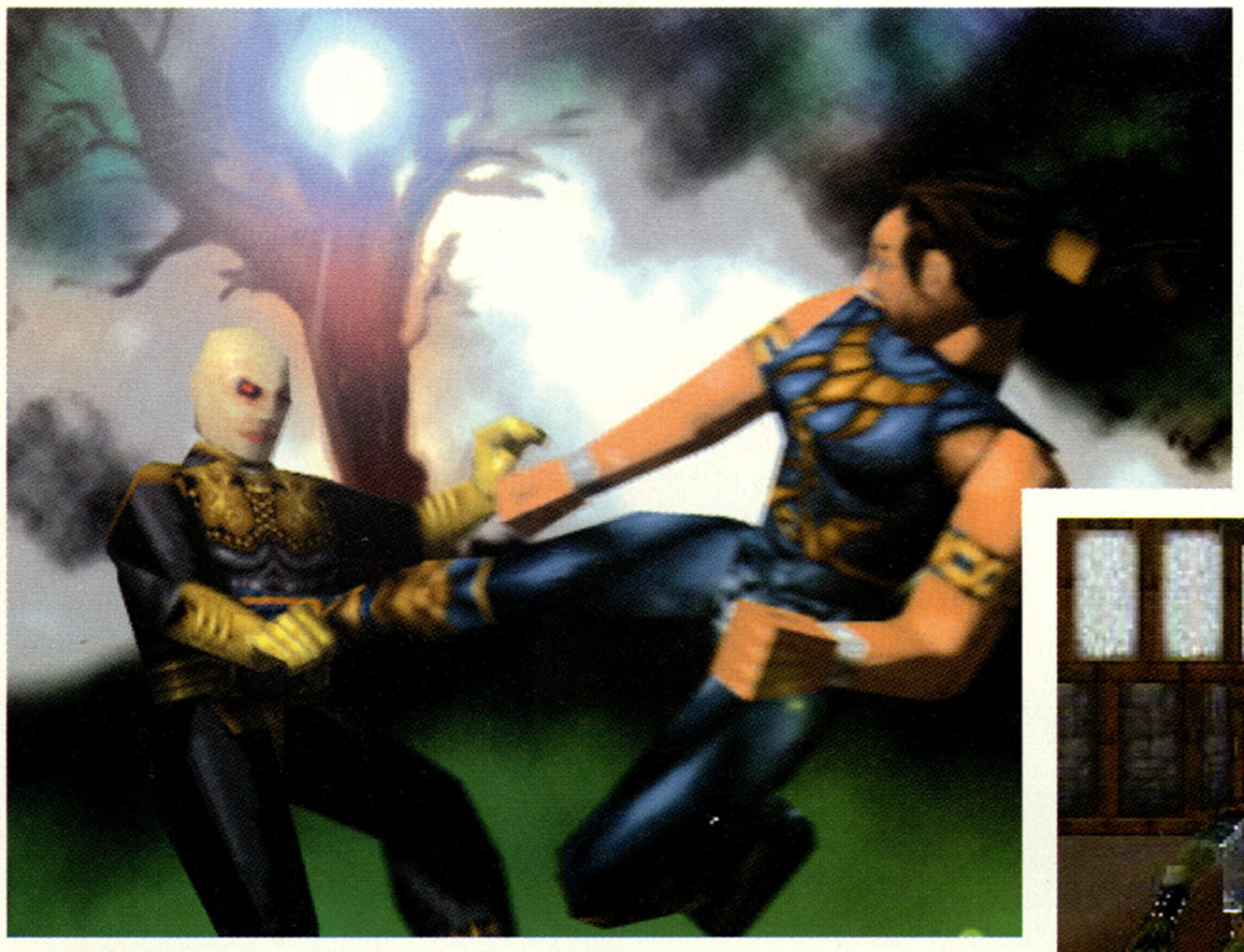
Every object in *Power Crystal* will feature Gourard shading and will be affected by sunlight and shadows, which is a breeze for the M2





Miles of game area have been put together using single tiles. A contour map converts the data into tables. All the graphics are 3D polygons except lamp posts, bushes, and birds which are implemented as sprites

ng alphas







Combat (above) will take place in real time. Character Studio helps Dave Lago work to generate animation

Team pedigree

Perceptions's CEO, Andrew Whittaker, first taught himself programming on the ZX81 way back in '81. In 1984 he left school and joined the Graftgold team where, along with Andrew Braybrook and Steve Turner, he contributed to a host of chart-topping 8-bit products.

Whittaker then went on to work with Alien artist HR Giger on *Darkseed*, a game that became a major success in the States. He has also worked with Mike Singleton on Ashes of Empire and, prior to forming Perceptions, wrote Alien vs Predator for the Jaguar, a game which went on to sell over 345,000 copies.

Other titles the rest of the team have worked on include *Matchday* in conjunction with Jon Ritman, *Defcon 5*, *Pitfall 2*, *Bubsy* and *Mortal Coil*. In total, over 30 titles have been written by individuals before joining the company.



"*Power Crystal* has revolutionary elements to it such as character progression. Every player starts his or her life in an identical manner, with the same status. The character evolves and grows by the way that they live their life. If the player fights a lot they get better at it, as in real life, or if they trade a lot, the player will become a skilled trader." Character traits are carefully balanced and modified by the AI system according to player actions and experiences. After half an hour of playing, each player will have a totally different character attuned to their own personal gaming interests and desires.

The script for the game was written by Whittaker and Lago and reads much like a novel. The basic plotline concerns seven pieces of crystal that hold the balance of power within the world of Kelemar. The player has to recover the pieces to gain magic power to defeat an invading army.

It's more complicated than it sounds, and in order to realize the cinematic scope of the plot, the entire game is being put together in a true movie-like style. Every eventuality is being storyboarded with dozens of books full of story. The walls are covered in artwork depicting all the characters set to appear in the game. There's even a detailed map of *Power Crystal*'s world, Kelemar, in a back room. The team claims that the game's texture-mapped landscape covers over 20,000 square miles. "A landscape of this size is a tall order for any machine," admits Whittaker. "The M2, however, makes it that much easier ... "

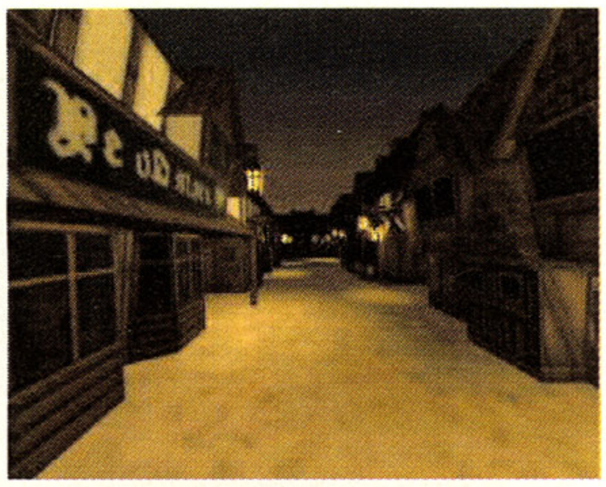
There are due to be around 10,000 creatures roaming around the landscape. These are divided into 35 different types including orcs, dwarfs, giants, dragons and, of course, humans. And because the game is in real time, the player can actually stand still in one of the towns and watch everyone going about their business. When the player does move, the entire true 3D realm is explorable — it's possible to walk into any building, get into a boat and cross the sea, or even ride a horse. Even this aspect is true to life: some horses are wild and run away, while others are tame and calm. The game also enables teleportation from one place to another, so the player needn't plod miles to reach a new area.

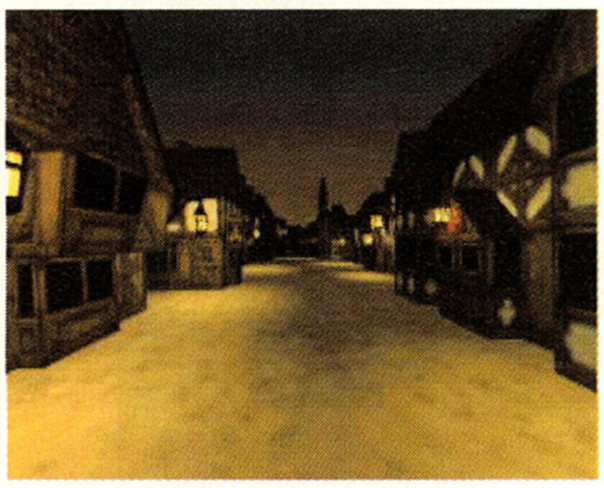
Most impressive is the intricate detail and realism packed into *Power Crystal*. The game is in real time and includes a speeded-up circle of night; after one hour of daylight play, the world turns dark, and vice versa. Weather





The player will be able to enter every building in the game — some are considerably more grand than others





Perceptions has obviously taken influences from many sources, such as *Legend of Zelda 64*

Walking around a town, it's difficult not to be impressed with the fluidity

effects such as rain, snow, and fog are also included. Even climatic conditions have been synthesized: players that climb a mountain will be met with dense fog at the summit, just as in real life.

The city **Next Generation** saw was filled with houses that can be entered. Once inside, the game camera adopts a fixed point in the top corner of the room, and the player is free to interact with its inhabitants.

The wealth of peripheral detail doesn't hide mediocre gameplay. "There's so much to do in *Power Crystal* — fighting, trading, exploring, interacting, strategizing," claims Whittaker. "Basically, you live your life in a whole 3D environment, even the set-piece quests can be attempted in any order and by a variety of methods. A key was to make the whole gameplay experience non-linear, so you really feel that you are there and the master of your own destiny. If you want to join forces with a bad guy, you can do that or go and help out a local duke with his problems."

Walking around a town, it's difficult not to be impressed by the speed and fluidity with which the real-time environment is generated, with no noticeable jitter whatsoever. When **Next Generation** visited Perceptions, *Power Crystal* was running at 60fps — and the current development kit only has one PowerPC chip. The final version will use two and should run at least twice as fast. There may well be slowdown when its full quota of graphics is up and running, but even then, the frame rate should still achieve a higher count than other 32- or 64-bit systems can presently manage.

If all goes to plan, *Power Crystal* could pan out to be an astounding showcase for M2. The sheer detail on display in the game is staggering, and, coupled with the rich 3D graphics, may well be enough to tempt RPG fans away from the clutches of Sony and Nintendo. Every new piece of hardware needs a killer app; with this and Warp's *D2* on the horizon, bigwigs at Matsushita must be rubbing their hands together with glee.

Now that hardware can make complex, real-time 3D environments, the potential for large-scale RPGs that generate new senses of being there is growing, and Perceptions's first game could lead the way.

Power Crystal is due to be finished for Christmas, but no publisher has yet been set. Whittaker should perhaps expect to see a bundle of offers landing on his desk over the coming months...

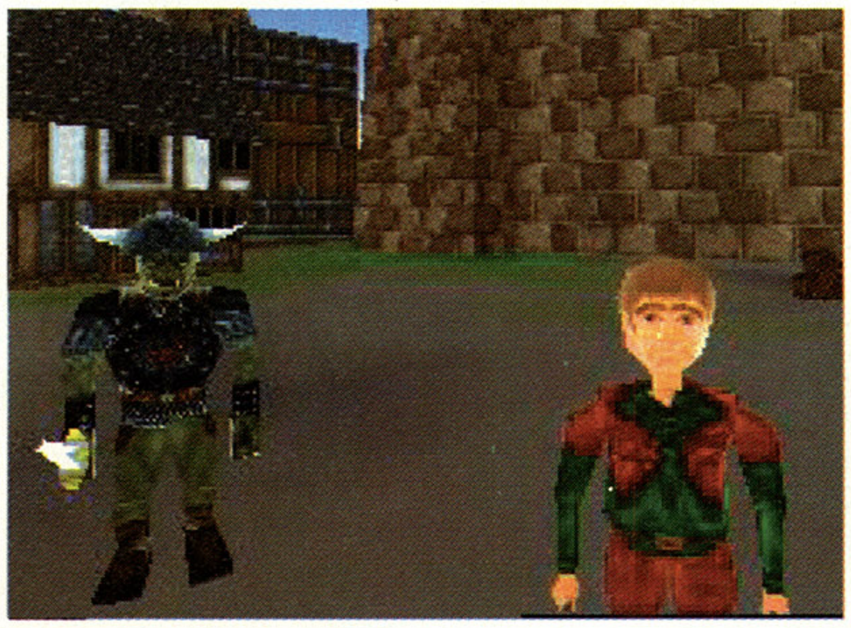
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In development

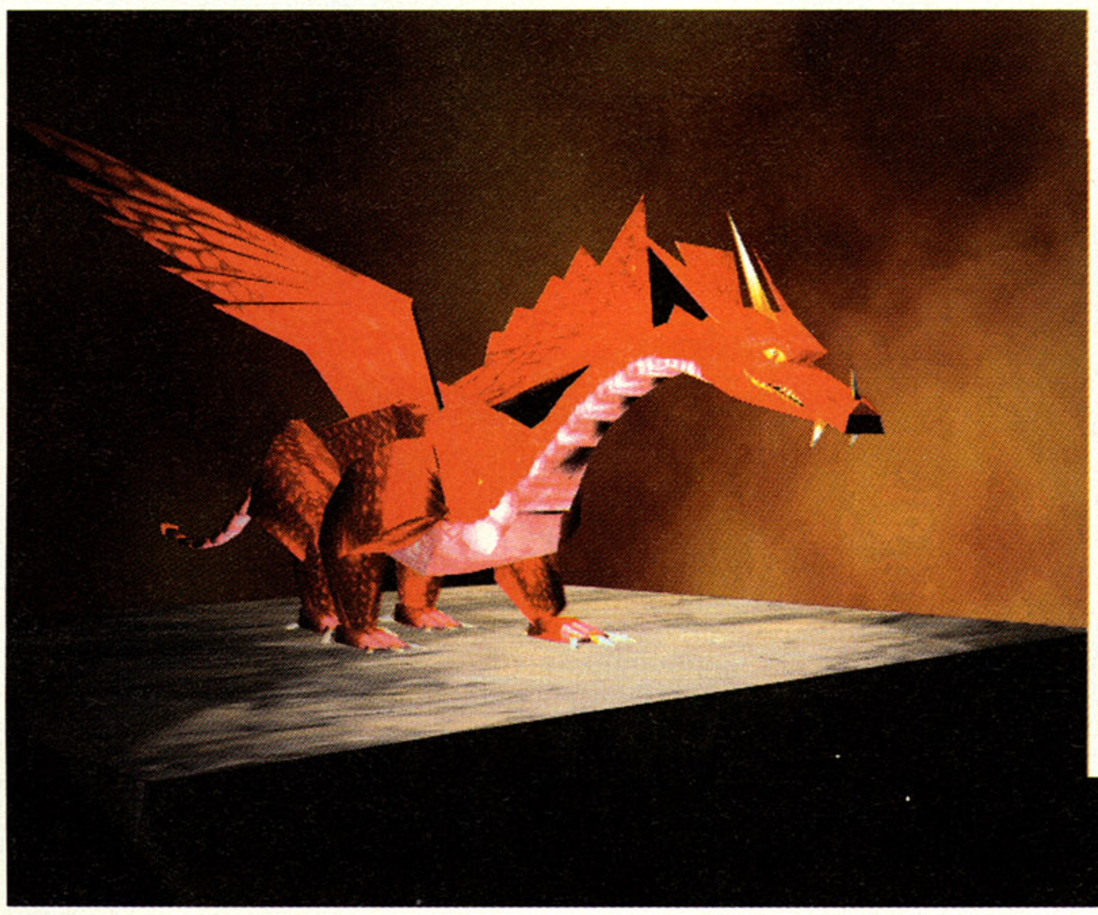
Apart from its flagship title, *Power Crystal*, Perceptions has three other games under development for release.

***Jester* (working title) is a platform adventure game in a similar mold to Sony's *Crash Bandicoot*, with more freedom to move around a 3D area, as in *Tomb Raider*. The intro sequence Next Generation saw running on PC was very impressive, showing Jester as a large, colorful character running around a full 3D castle environment with excellent shadow and lighting effects.**

Also in development is an as-yet-unnamed 3D puzzle game and a 3D tank shooter called *Flagfight* (again, working title) which uses essentially the same engine as *Power Crystal*.







One of the game's biggest adversaries is a big red dragon (left). The game will feature 35 different types of characters. Animation is not yet complete, but Perception promises fluidity and realism

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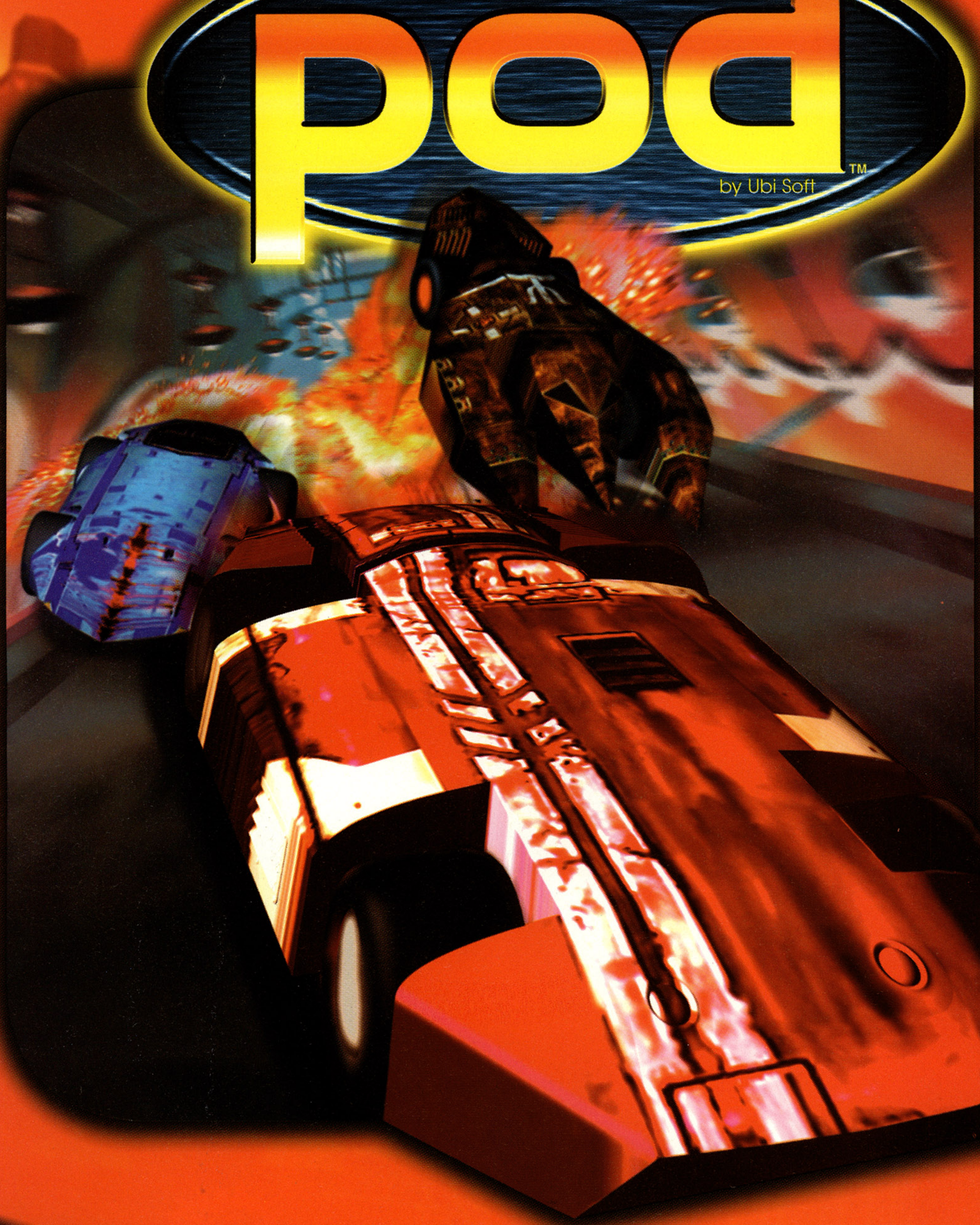
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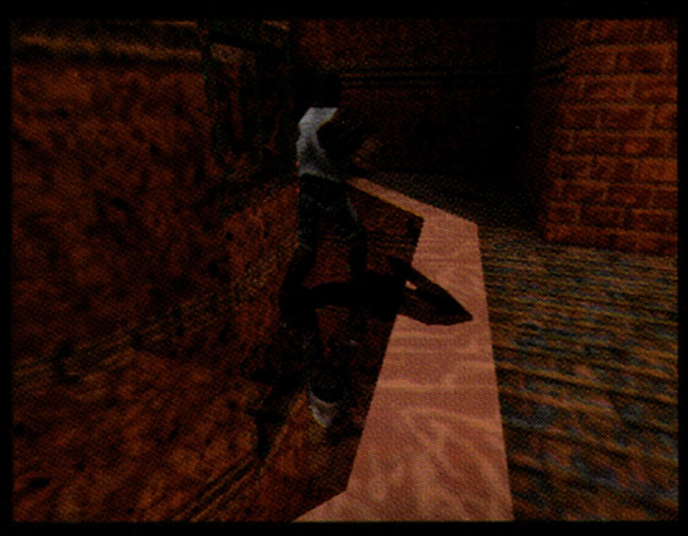
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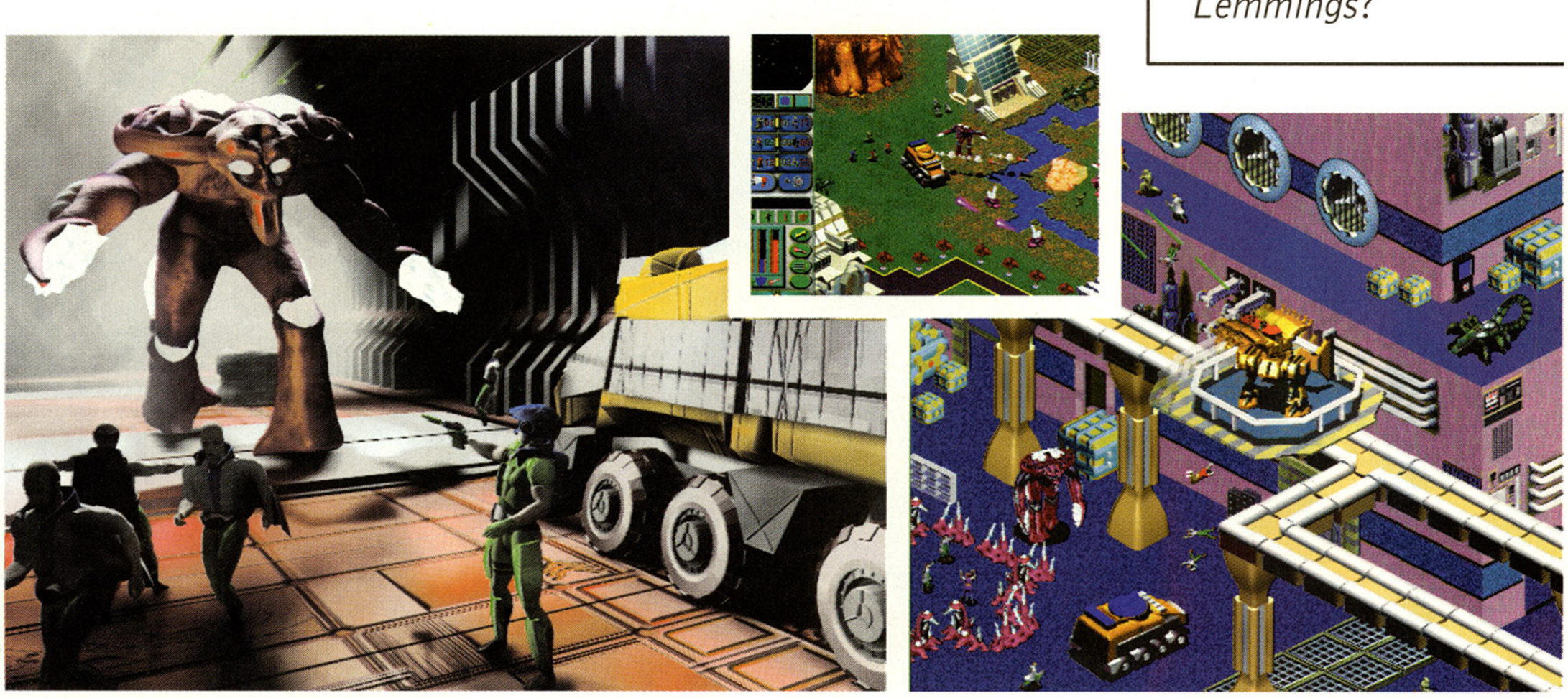


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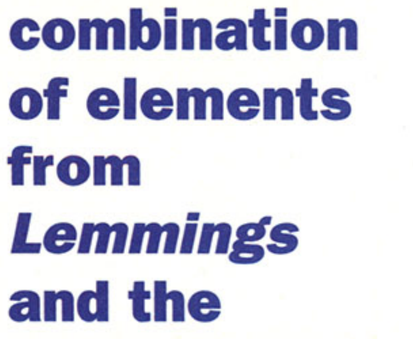
Captives

Sierra and Impressions try to breathe new life into the action/puzzle genre — but can they really build a better *Lemmings*?



The isometric perspective opens up traditional action-puzzle elements

Gameplay resembles a combination of elements from *Lemmings* and the classic Apple II game *Choplifter*



The only big question is: do captives make little squeals when they die?

Format:	**PC CD-ROM**
Publisher:	**Sierra**
Developer:	**Impressions**
Release Date:	**June 1997**
Origin:	**U.S.**

It could be argued that the action/puzzle genre, which took off with the publication of *Lemmings* in the early '90s, has languished since the advent of real-time strategy games like *Warcraft II* and *Command & Conquer*. Now developer Impressions is trying to remedy that with *Captives*, a new spin on the formula. The game takes place in a far-off planetary colony, under attack by some decidedly unfriendly aliens, who have taken numerous hostages. The player takes the role of Dak Ransome, a professional hostage rescuer, who enters the domed city in his combination rescue wagon and tank.

Gameplay resembles a combination of elements from *Lemmings* and the classic Apple II game *Choplifter*. The main idea is to locate a group of hostages, free them using the firepower of the tank, and then use the skills of the rescued captives to open up new areas and free additional prisoners. The four types of captives are civilians, engineers, scientists, and soldiers; only a limited number of each can be found in each of the game's 25 to 30 levels. The developers are quick to point out, however, that like in *Lemmings*, many levels will have multiple solutions.

The most noticeable break from the tried and true is the use of a three-quarter, isometric perspective, as opposed to the side-scrolling, 2D which has been the norm, even for such recent action/puzzle releases as *Lost Vikings II*. While not yet fully 3D, the perspective still manages to open up the playfield considerably, giving a sense of scale and size often missing from the more simplified graphics of a *Lemmings* or *Humans*.

Overall, the game should combine a fast pace with humor and an easy-to-use interface. Multiplayer support is planned, and a level editor should be released sometime shortly after the game itself hits the shelves. With its high-res graphics and new approach, *Captives* could fill a niche the computer game industry hasn't really seen in a while. ng







The player will have to carefully manage the skills of freed captives

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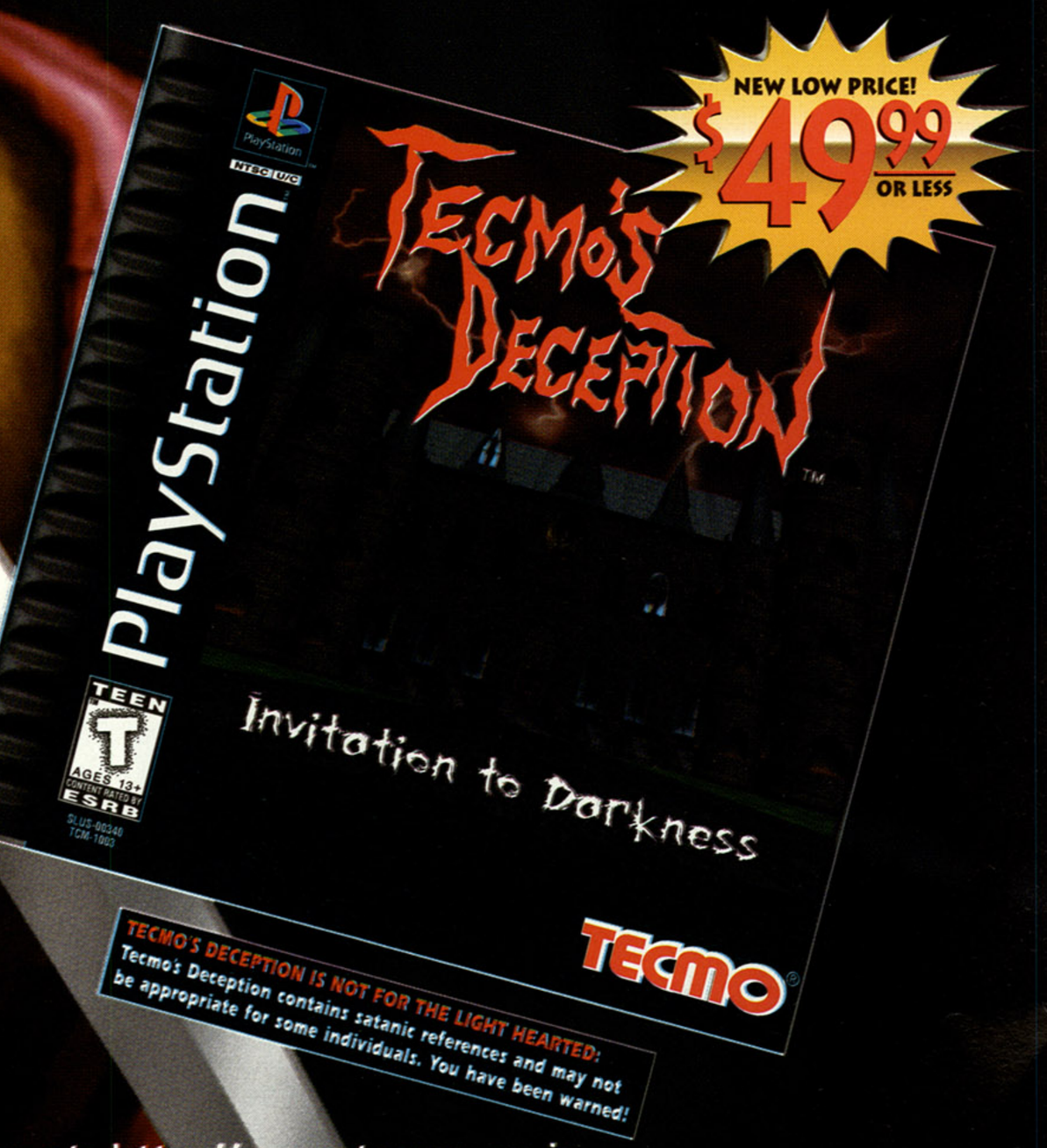
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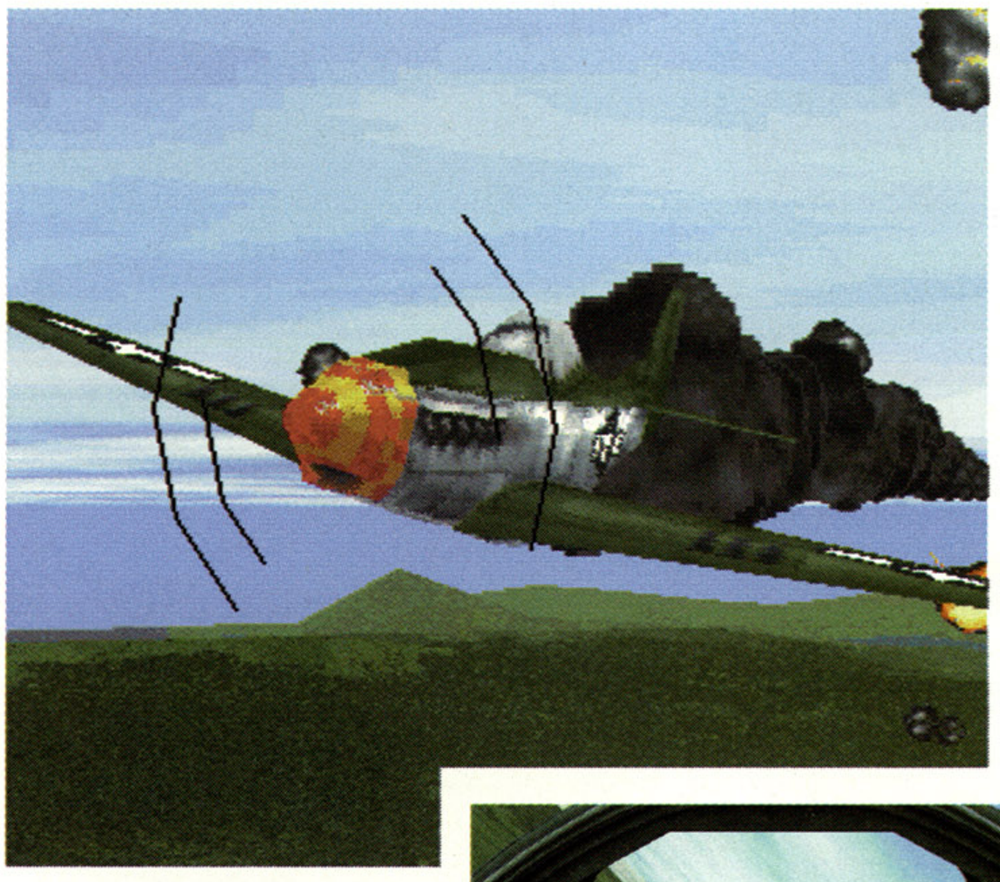
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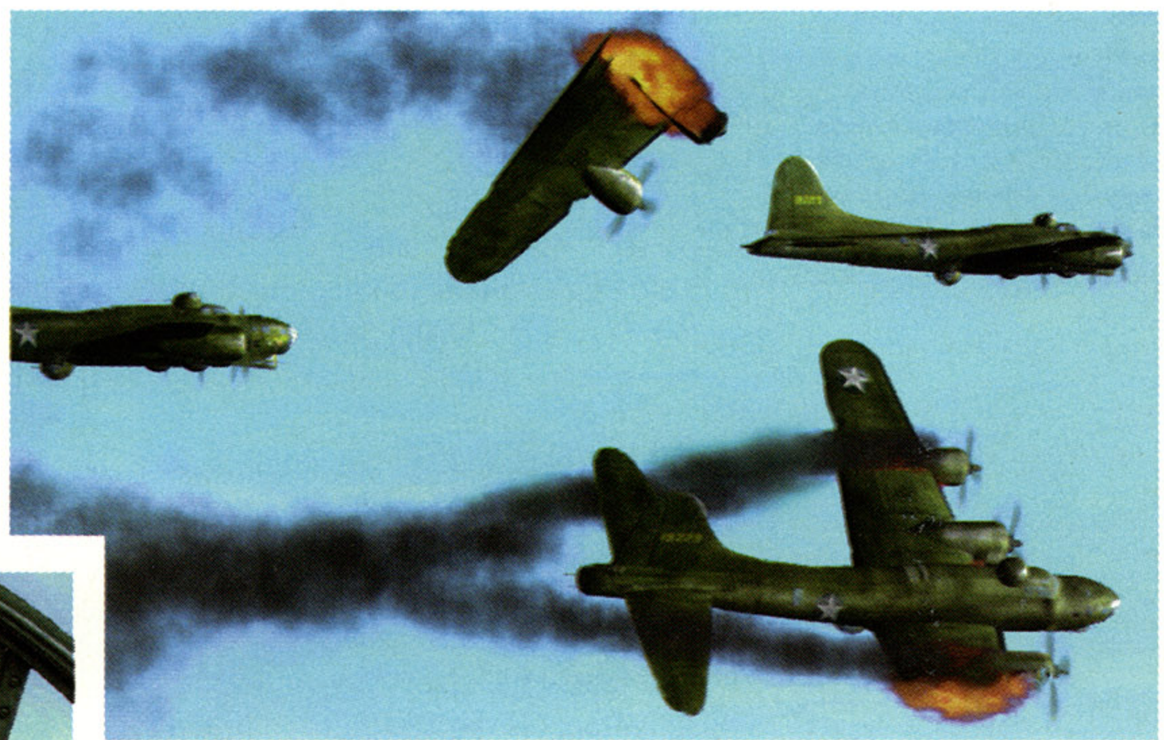
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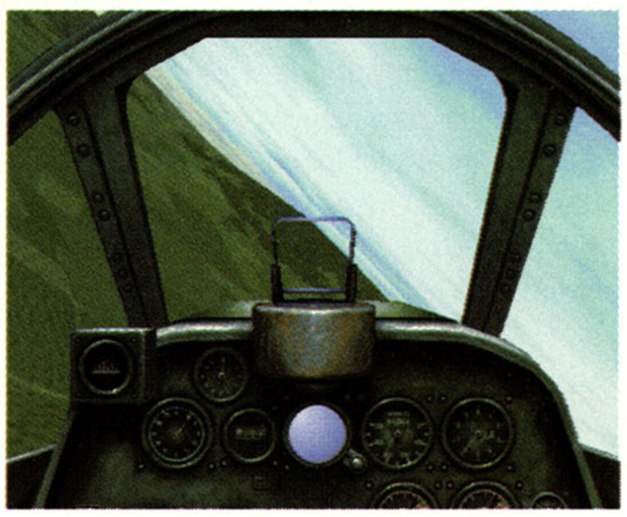
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There are 20 flyable aircraft, including the American P-41 and P-38, the British Hurricane and Spitfire, and the German ME9. There are also 10 non-flyable aircraft, most of which are bombers. The game boasts custom cockpits for each plane, including the P-38 (right)

Format:	**PC CD-ROM**
Publisher:	**MicroProse**
Developer:	**MicroProse**
Release Date:	**Fall 1997**
Origin:	**U.S.**

"We have a mission we call Chattanooga in which players must destroy a train moving in real time"

Mike Rey, Lead Designer

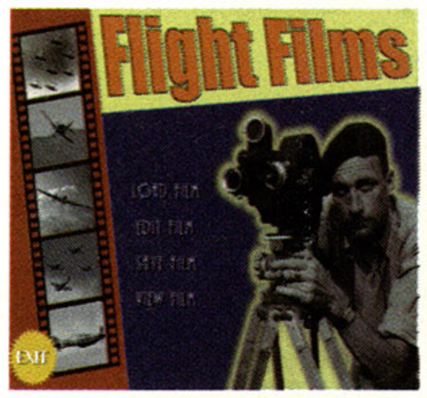
In the pre-Pentium year of 1994, a sim entitled *1942: Pacific Air War* (fondly referred to as *PAW* by its developers) accurately recreated the intense air combat that followed the attack on Pearl Harbor. After a lengthy development period, the makers of *PAW* return with a sequel that looks to be as different from the first as England is from Hawaii.

"*European Air War* offers strictly fighter careers," says lead designer Mike Rey. Although no dive-bombing or torpedo runs exist as in *PAW*, players will carry out ground strikes and bomb machine gun nests, airfields, rail yards, bridges, and the like. "You'll go tank-busting and train-busting," says Rey. "We have a mission we call Chattanooga, a big train-busting mission, in which players must destroy a train moving in real time."

Given the PC technology leap made since 1994, MicroProse has scrapped much of *PAW*'s code, has ported the engine from 16-bit to 32-bit, and doubled the maximum number of simultaneous planes in the air from 16 to 32 in the process. According to producer Mike Springer, "We've taken the flight engine, and all the best things out of that game, and we're improving upon them," he says anxiously. "We've added a dynamic career mode, gone hi-res, Win 95, DirectPlay — all the new buzz words, so to speak."

Both Springer and Rey emphasize the historical accuracy of the two career modes. The mini-career mode recreates the height of the Battle Of Britain, from July through September 1940, in which players can select the German or British sides. The main career, or European career, runs from April 1943 through April 1945, and players can choose to be American, British, or German forces.



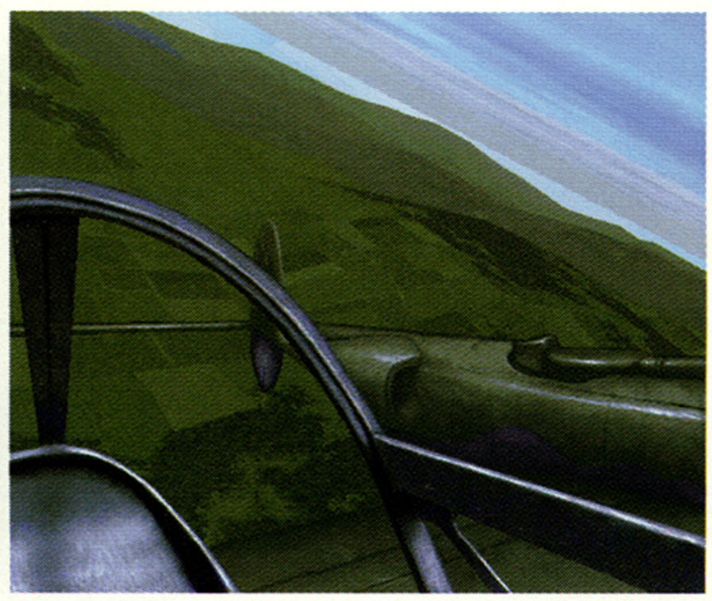


The game's front end design truly captures the spirit of the period

ng alphas







EAW* has enhanced *PAW*'s radio communications and has made the wingmen more responsive in hopes of alleviating some of the isolation players may have felt in *PAW

Players choose which fighter squadron to join depending on what side they are flying for, and the particular squadron determines what year they actually start flying. "If you choose an American career," Rey says, "and you choose the 56th fighter group, you'll start in April '43. If you choose the 357th fighter group, you'll start in January '44."

MicroProse has set up a dynamic, reactive world with missions randomly generated on the fly. According to Singer, the campaign system is geared to generate missions that follow the objectives of that squadron. "If the first mission of the 357th was to make a fighter sweep over a particular area," he says, "you'll be making sweeps, but it won't historically follow exactly what that squadron did, it just follows the objectives. If you play the same career path a second time, you will not have the same missions."

While the game remains within historical bounds, it still lends enough random elements to enable replayability. During what Rey calls "phases," the Americans, British, and Germans must meet particular objectives. How well players perform during the current phase affects future phases. Rey paints a scenario in which, as an American pilot, the objective is to knock out German aircraft. This ultimately reflects how many encounters the player will have with aircraft in later missions. If the player does a particularly good job during that phase, less encounters may ensue.

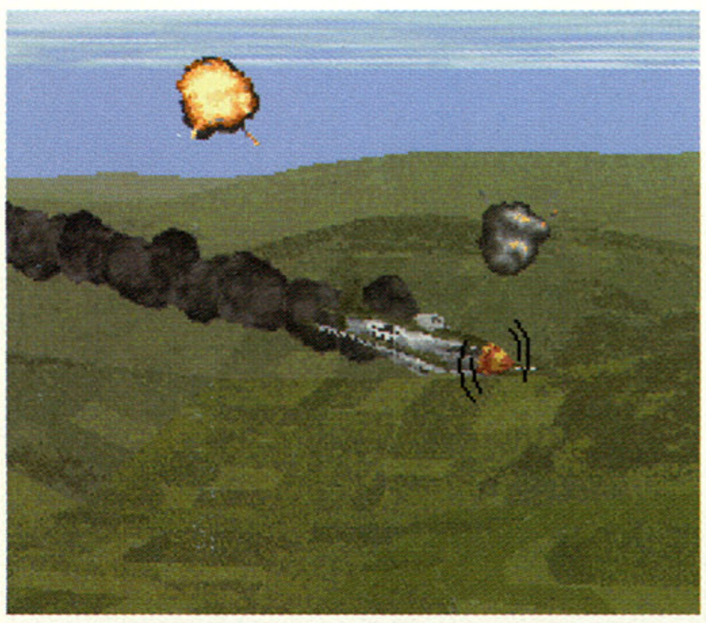
The team believes a P90 system will provide optimal performance, and 3D-accelerator support is planned. *EAW* will also ship with network capabilities — tenatively, an eight-player LAN and about eight players over the Net.

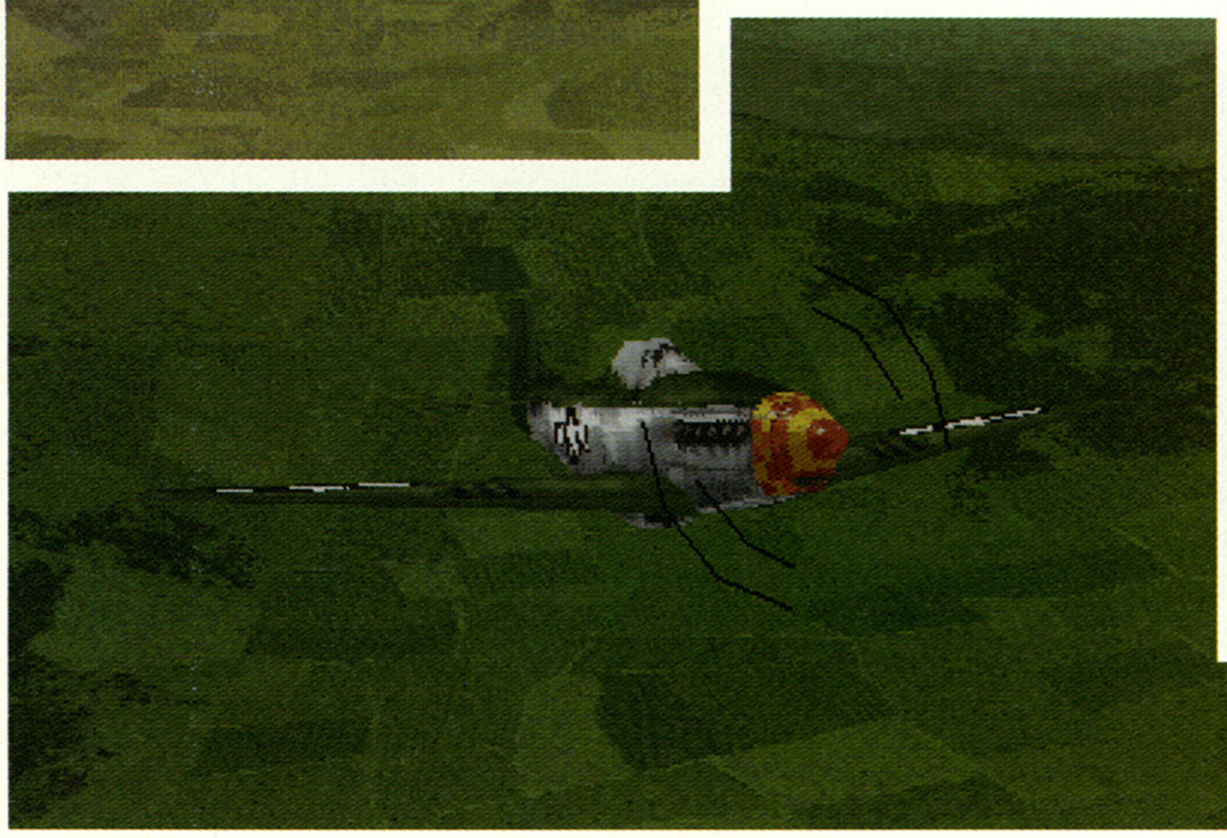
"You can't alter the course of the war," Singer says when asked if it would be possible to win playing as Germany. But he notes it's possible to get a message stating that you've prolonged the conflict through superior air command. However, if MicroProse can make *European Air War* as engaging as *Pacific Air War* once was, history will certainly repeat itself within the confines of another excellent sim.

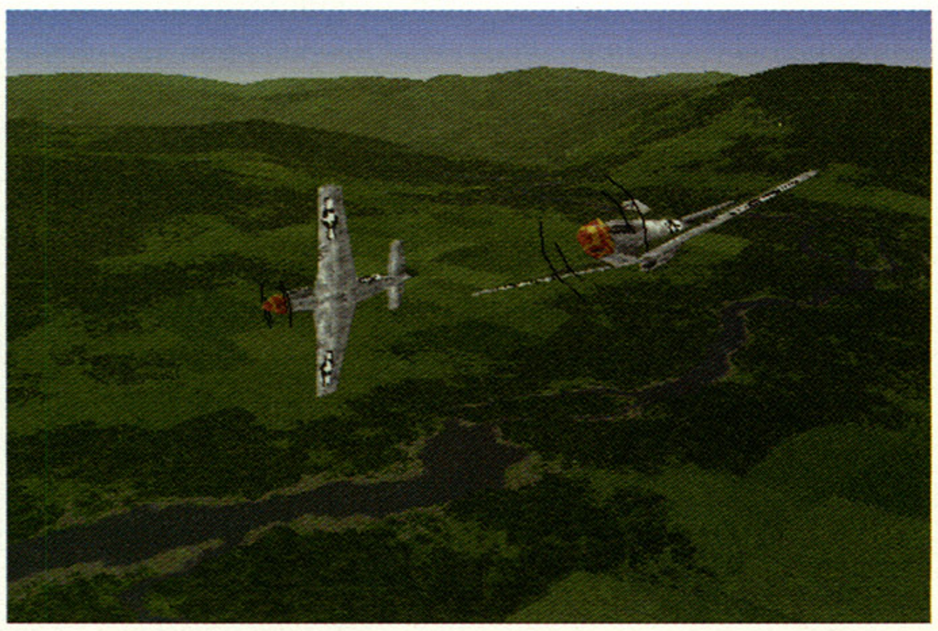
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"If you play the same career path a second time, you will not have the same missions"

Mike Singer, Producer





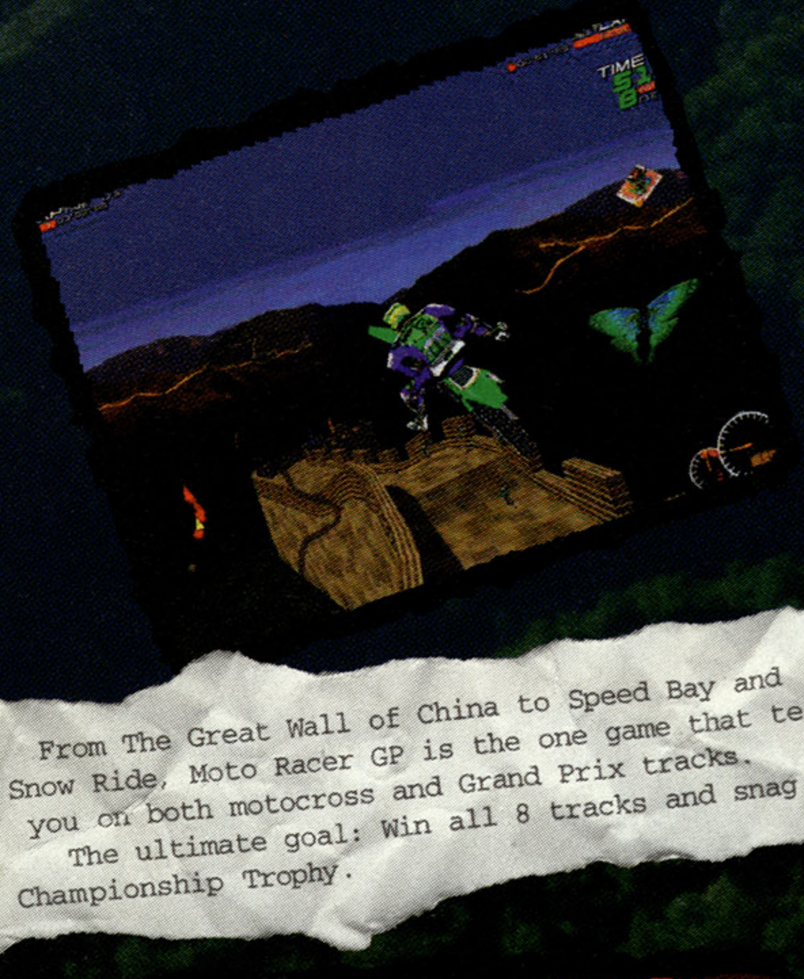


Unlike *PAW*, *EAW*'s CPU enemy planes have a morale factor, so when they take 30% or more damage, they'll attempt to make a hasty retreat. Because *EAW* can generate aircraft on the fly, there's always the threat of enemy fighters

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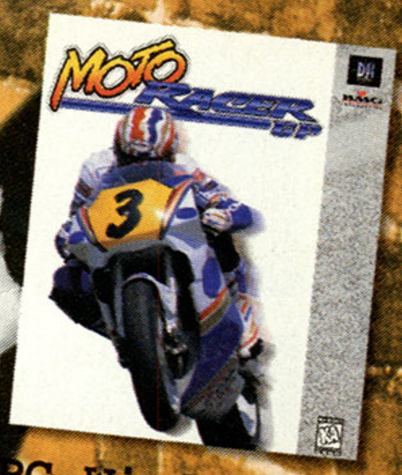
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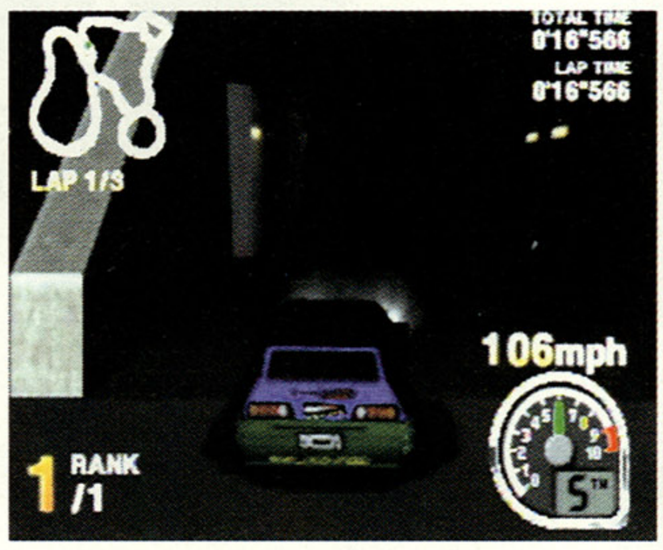
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Top Gear Rally

Will a worthy motor racing game ever cross the finish line for N64? *Top Gear Rally* is in the final stretch and leading the pack







Players will be able to adjust a car's suspension and shocks. They can also detail the exterior paint and logos, then save their customized car to the control pack memory card

Format:	**Nintendo 64**
Publisher:	**Kemco**
Developer:	**Boss Games**
Release Date:	**August 1997**
Origin:	**U.S.**

Considering *Cruis'n USA* is the only available auto racing title and a poor one to boot, the most unnecessary peripheral on the market right now is the Nintendo 64 steering wheel. But in taking Kemco's Top Gear license from 16-bit obscurity and resurrecting it on Nintendo 64, *Top Gear Rally* could change all that.

Top Gear Rally features on- and off-road courses similar to those seen in *Sega Rally* and Sony's *Rally Cross* and adds some of the straight-away speed found in *Ridge Racer*. "*Sega Rally* is an obvious inspiration," says technical director Rob Povey with a fairly thick English accent. "It's a great game, but our game is going to feel and look very, very different."

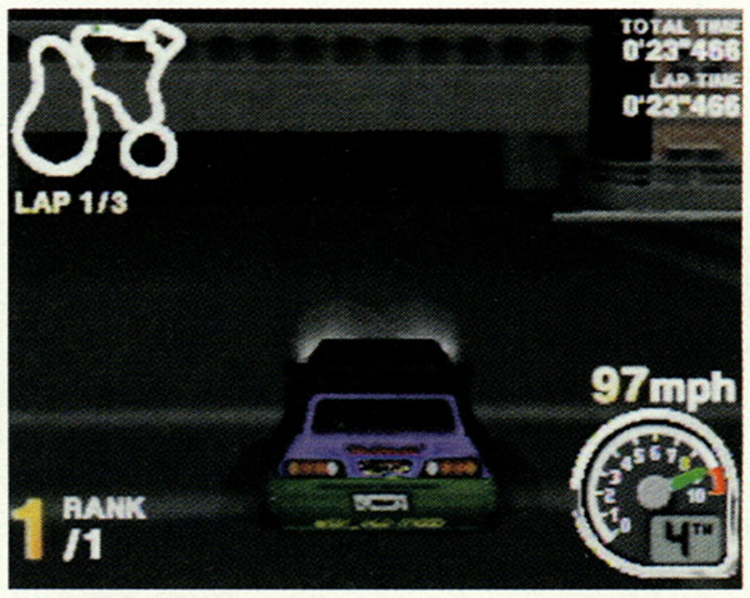
Povey doesn't believe in copycat products and refutes any notion that *Top Gear* is anything of the sort. "With original titles you can't say, 'I'm going to copy this game, only do it better.' " he proclaims. "If you do, you end up with something that is only slightly better. I want people to compare other games to my game."

Players select from 11 cars (two will be hidden) and can choose one of four views — a cockpit view, two separate chase-views, and a front view. The cars are all modeled from real-world vehicles, with a physics engine that ensures each vehicle differs in its handling,

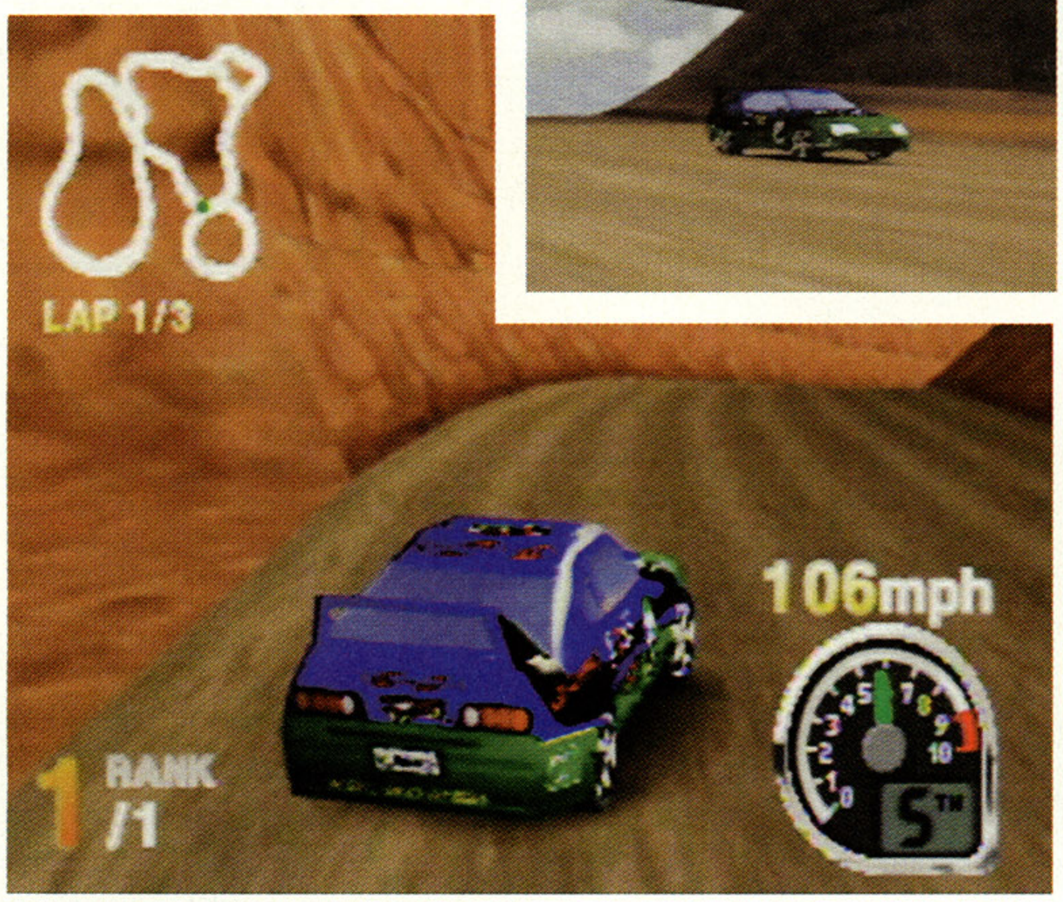




From this view, players can still see the rear-view mirror and speedometer



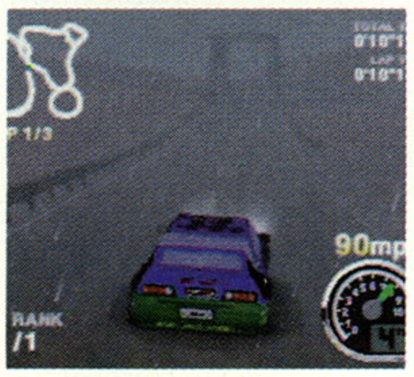
Each track will offer shortcuts, but many will be tough to navigate. Headlights used in night racing show off *Top Gear*'s volumetric lighting



Vehicles have specular highlights, noticeable along the right side of this car







Varying weather will obviously affect visibility and course conditions

especially between those with front-wheel, rear-wheel, or all-wheel drivetrains.

With at least four tracks (loosely described as Desert, Forest, Coastal, and Riverbed), players can expect a variety of challenging terrain. A fifth track is a possibility, but Boss has not yet determined if it will make it in.

The team at Boss spent between two and three months just developing the tools that have created such superb detail. Even the one-track demo was nearly devoid of pop-in, a tremendous problem for *Cruis'n*.

"The way to avoid pop-in," Povey instructs, "is to design your tracks in a clever manner so it doesn't become apparent. We have a very large view distance available to the artists before we have any pop-in anyway," he says. Povey expects each finished track to be remiss of the problem.

A split-screen mode will enable two players to compete simultaneously. According to Colin Gordon, VP of product development, it was impossible to add simultaneous four-player racing (as in *Mario Kart 64*) because of the polygonal complexity of the *Top Gear* vehicles. It would've also sacrificed the 30fps frame rate and the game's ability to redraw lavish scenery. "Rob promises to chop off a finger for every frame less than 30," Gordon jokes.

"Everyone agrees it looks really good," Povey says. "I want it to play as good as it looks. That's more important than anything else." ng

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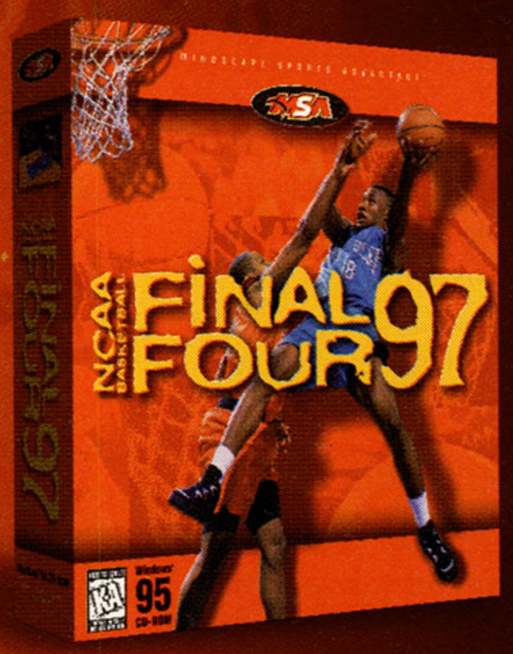
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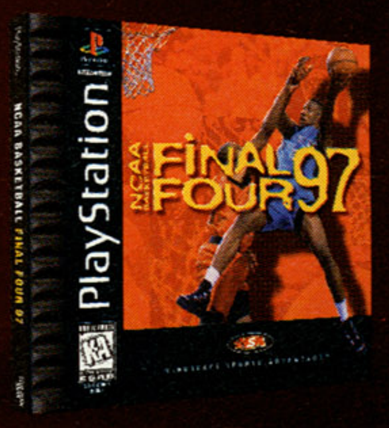
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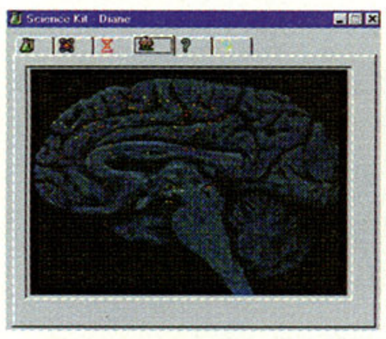
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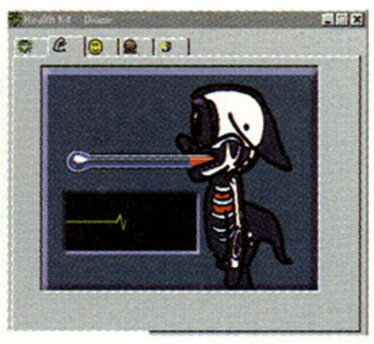
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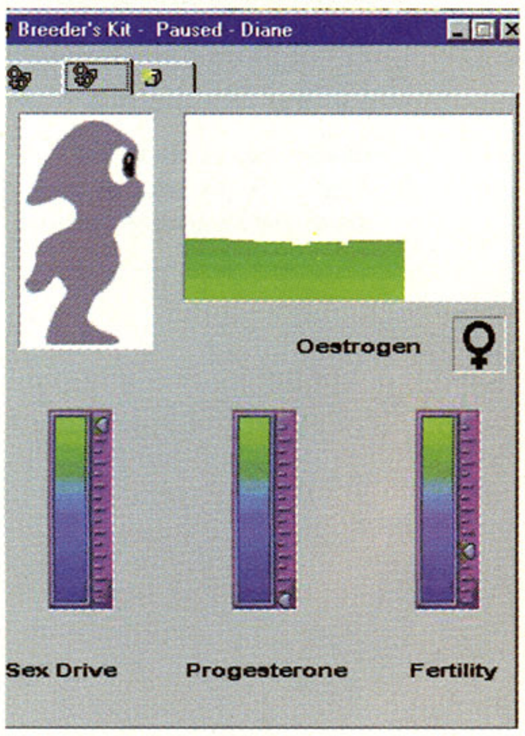
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The first artificial life game is about to hit the market — are you ready to start breeding your own family of virtual pets?

Creatures









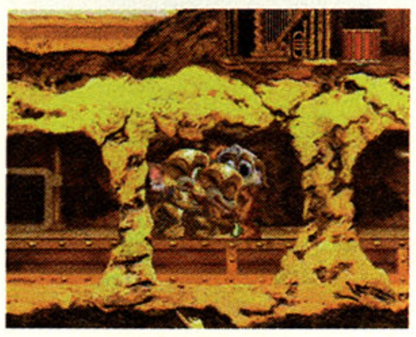


To keep track of each of your Norns, there are a variety of control panels. Some panels are responsible for keeping track of health, others enable you to administer medicine, others help you keep track of heritage

Teaching your Norns nouns and verbs is key to controlling their behavior; communication proves to be of prime importance in *Creatures*







The world of the Norns isn't very large, but it is extremely detailed

Format:	**PC CD-ROM**
Publisher:	**Mindscape**
Developer:	**Millenium Interactive**
Release Date:	**June 1997**
Origin:	**U.K.**

As profiled in NG 23, Millennium Interactive's *Creatures* is startlingly different. It could be argued that it is less a game than a small scale genetic experiment disguised as entertainment.

Creatures is the first commercial release of artificial life technology to hit the market, beating out Anark's *Galapogos*, which has suffered some delays. The game revolves around a species of undeniably cute creatures called Norns, which bear a more than passing resemblance to Joe Dante's Gremlins. The player's task is to first hatch the Norns then attempt to teach and guide them through their two-dimensional world, known as Albia. The underlying mechanics of the system model the complex interactions of each Norn's individual body chemistry and neural networks — each Norn learns his or her own behavior and ways of interacting with the world and each other, and each Norn is unique.

Every copy of the game comes with a disc containing six genetically unique eggs, three male and three female. The player's first goal will naturally be to

ng alphas



The greenhouse is where Norns can get food. Carrots and lemons are the mainstay of a Norn diet and help nourish the critters to get through the rigors of life

Players can influence the Norns' behavior by rewarding them (through tickling) or punishing them (by a sharp slap on the rear end)

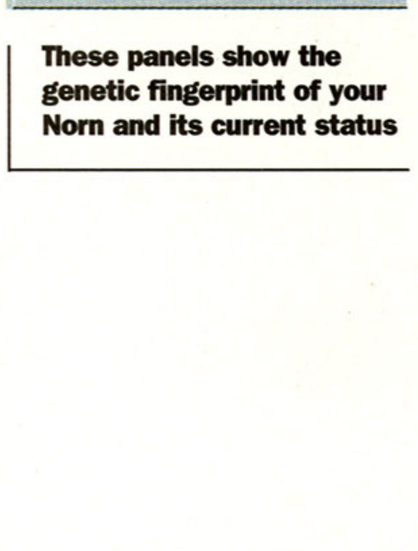
teach the curious newborn to talk so that it can tell what's on its mind. This is made easier by the inclusion of a "learning machine" which displays a rudimentary vocabulary and encourages the Norn to learn through repetition.

Once basic communication is established, a rather patient process of instruction can begin, although each Norn is perfectly capable of learning on its own. Players can influence their behavior by rewarding (through tickling) or punishing (by a sharp slap on the rear end) the Norns as they see fit. Exactly how well a given Norn takes to instruction depends on the individual Norn — during one session, an especially curious young female became so fascinated by a set of elevators that she spent an hour going up one and down the other, totally ignoring everything else, including the need to eat and sleep — but with enough perseverance players can gain some level of control through simple reinforcement. The more ambitious players can take even more drastic measures, introducing stimulants and herbs that can affect everything from energy level to sex drive.

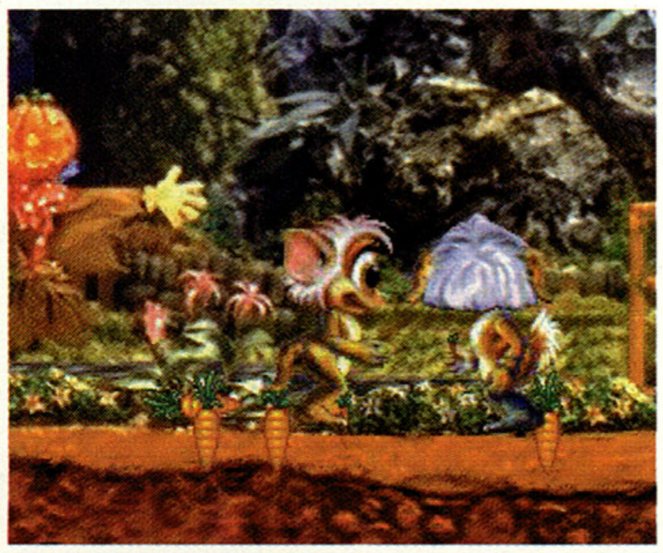
As successive generations of Norns develop — they do, after all, breed, and the offspring are a genetic combination of their parents plus some random mutations — older Norns can teach younger Norns, and groups of Norns can interact in complex and unpredictable ways. Albia even includes a rival species of sorts, the Grendels, which can attack the hapless Norns, steal their food, or give them diseases (although according to beta testers on the Web, it is apparently possible to crossbreed Grendels and Norns, creating a hybrid called Grenorns, whose characteristics are, at press time, open to speculation). In all, the Norn life cycle lasts 10 to 15 hours, at which point, they grow old and die.

Especially interesting generations of Norns can be exported from the game and posted to Usenet and World Wide Web sites for other *Creatures* devotees to download and add to their own worlds. Millennium itself has even set up a Web site with a "weekly six-pack" of Norn eggs for hatching and breeding.

Creatures isn't your average game. The satisfaction is in guiding a virtual being through its life and teaching it to behave how you wish — you can breed a generation of do-gooders or sociopaths. It may not be for everyone, but as a harbinger of artificial life products to come, it deserves a place in the sun. ng



These panels show the genetic fingerprint of your Norn and its current status







The learning machine (above) is a useful tool for teaching young Norns basic verbs. Cleanliness is next to Godliness for the Norns. Showers are provided for their use (left)

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688(I) Hunter Killer

EA's Jane's Combat Simulations teams up with a designer of high-end sims for the U.S. Navy to produce what could be the most realistic PC sub sim ever



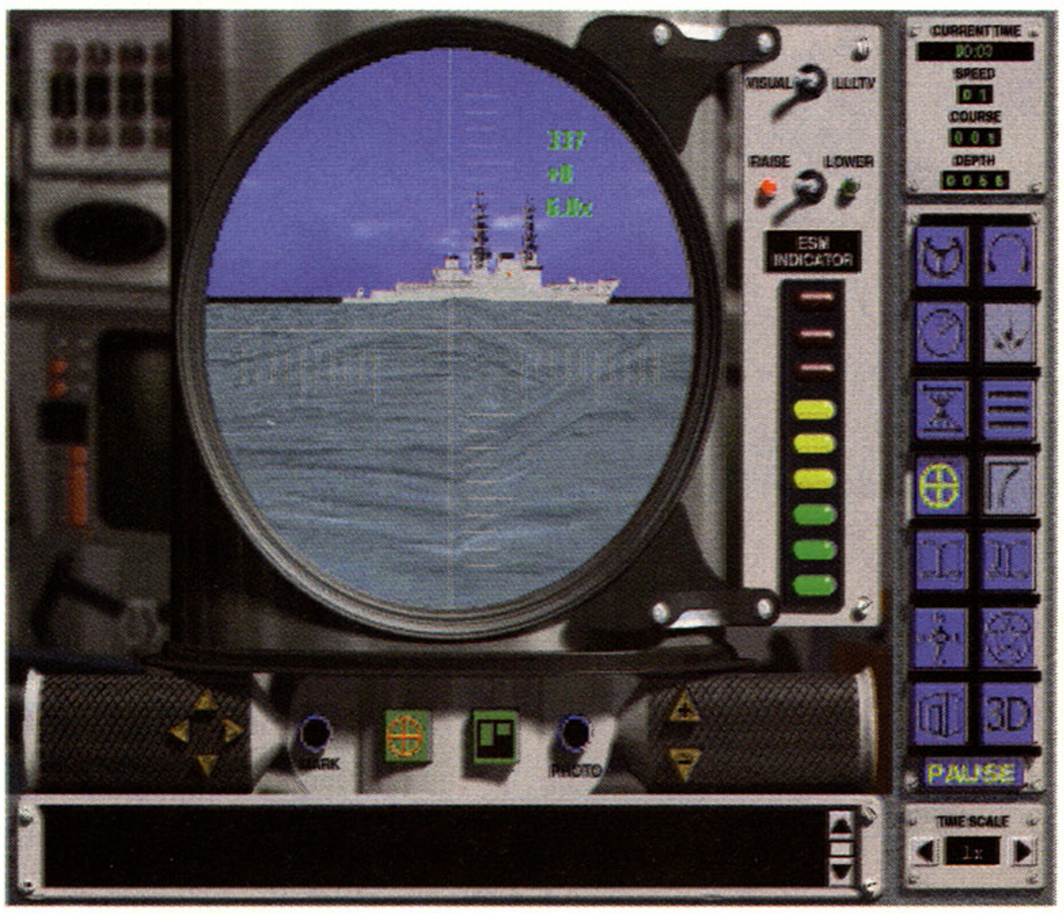
***688(I)* presents the player with a variety of missions and combat areas**

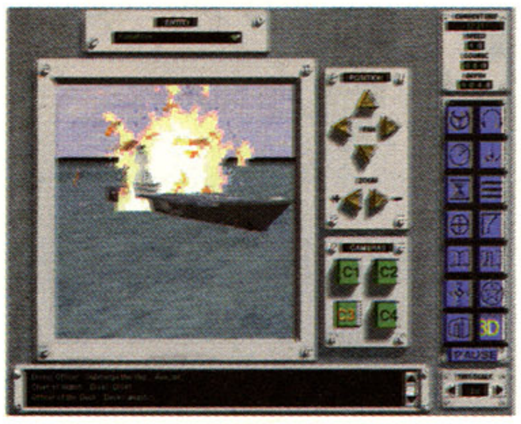
Format:	**PC CD-ROM**
Publisher:	**Jane's Combat Simulations**
Developer:	**Sonalysts**
Release Date:	**June 1997**
Origin:	**U.S.**

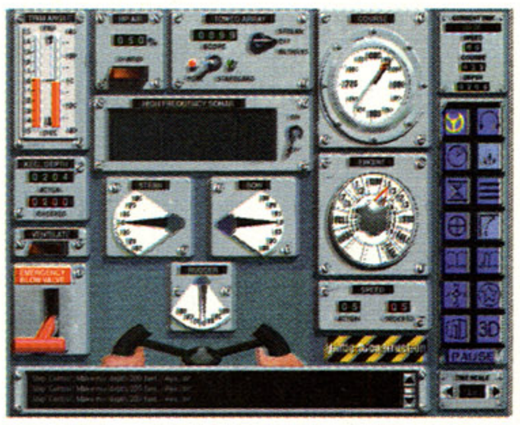
The collapse of the Soviet Union may have been bad news for the nation's military-industrial complex, but it's good news for computer sim fans. Case in point: *688(I) Hunter Killer*, a submarine sim developed by Sonalysts, the very firm that developed high-end sub sims and wargames for the Department of Defense (DOD).

"Ever since the Berlin wall came down," says Kim Castro, VP of Sonalysts and head of the *688* project, "we realized that defense budgets weren't going to be as big as they were in the Reagan years, so as a company we've been diversifying into industrial and entertainment applications." Castro continues, "Actually, working with EA is easier than working with the DOD. With the DOD, you've got a budget and a schedule, and they don't like it when you go over. Electronic Arts has been pretty free with resources."

The scenarios are based on "projections" from Jane's Information Group, with missions based in the Caribbean, the Atlantic, the Mediterranean, through the Suez Canal to the Persian Gulf, and finishing off with a tour in the Indian Ocean. "It's a little tougher finding bad guys these days," Castro admits, "but there are still plenty of hot spots, and fortunately — for us anyway — before it collapsed, the Soviet Union sold a lot of hardware all over the globe. So there's still a strong possibility sub commanders would encounter a technically advanced enemy."







The displays and gauges within the game were designed by many of the same people who worked on the real thing for the U.S. Navy

Alternate universes in which the Soviet threat still existed were briefly considered but were almost immediately dismissed, since they conflicted with the design team's goal of utter realism. "Sonalysts was founded by Dave Hinkle, a retired submarine commander," Castro explains, "and almost everyone involved with this project has real Navy

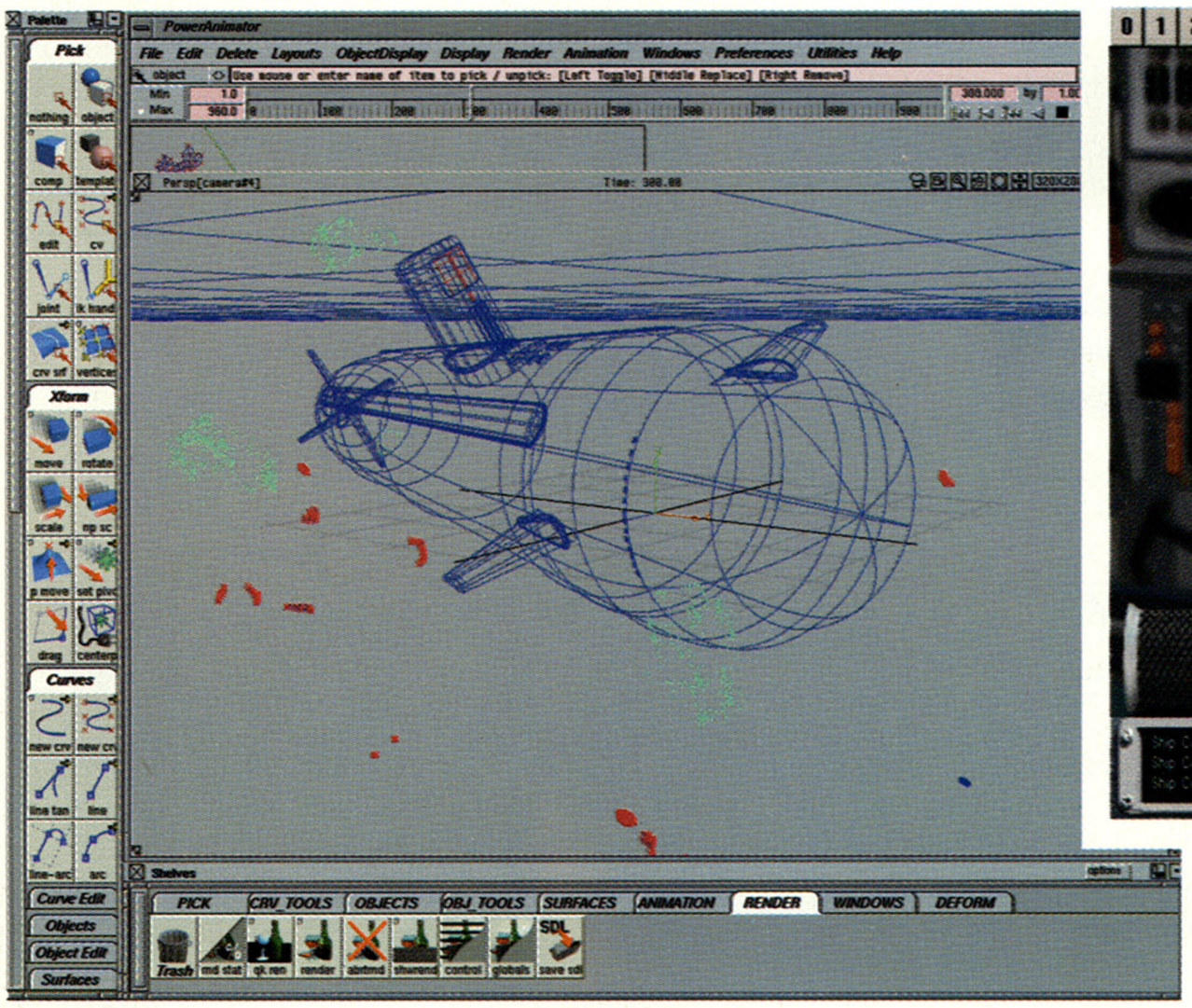


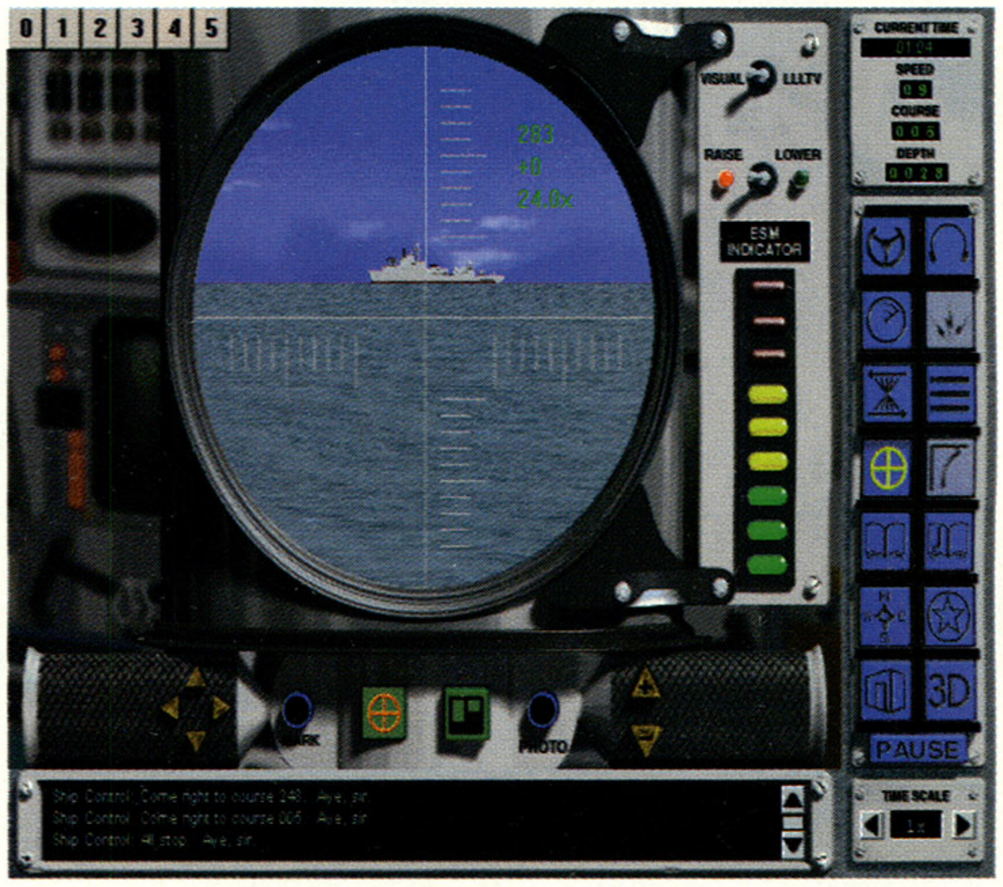
The exhaustive amount of data available to the developers means every vessel is accurate

"Working with Electronic Arts is a lot easier than working for the Department of Defense"

Kim Castro, VP Sonalysts

ng alphas

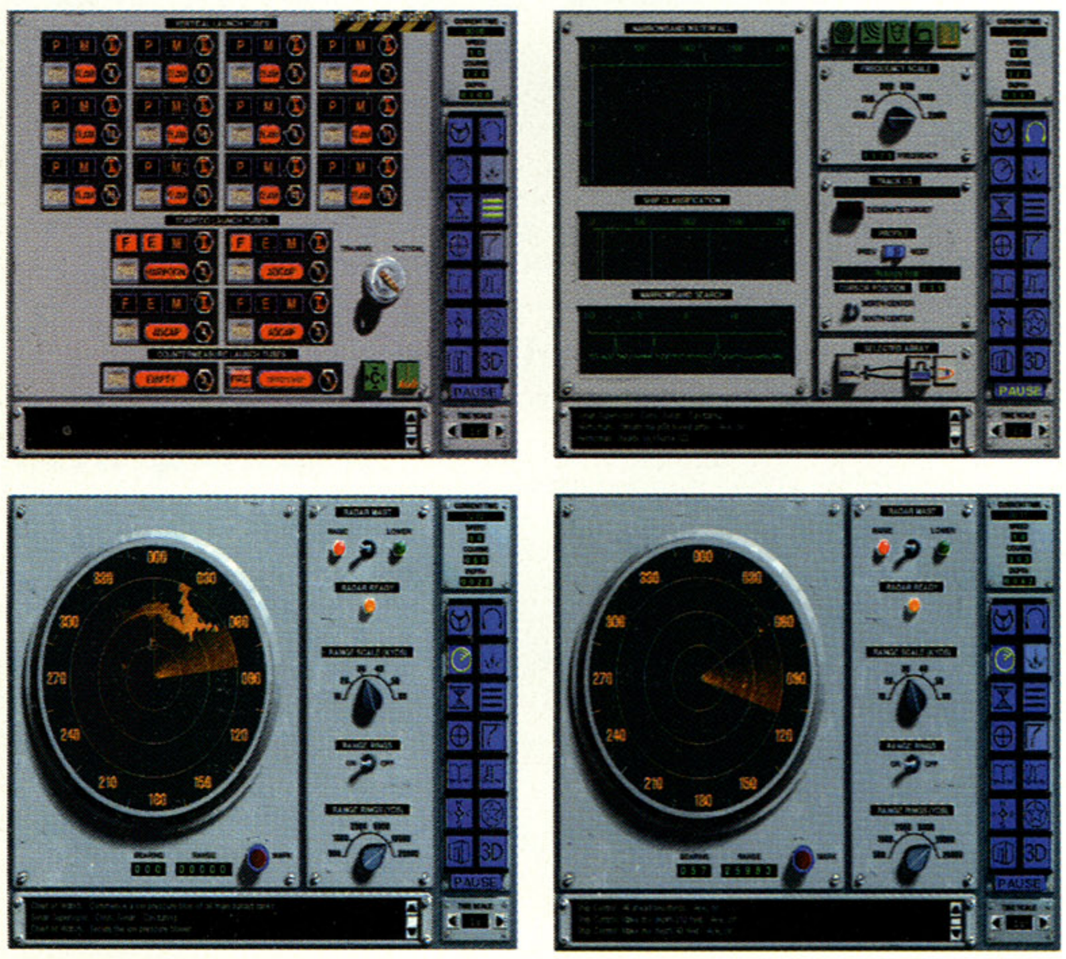




***688(I)* is the first submarine sim to use a fully 3D game engine, and the design team is justly proud of this. Indeed, the only off-the-shelf software used was PowerAnimator, running on SGI workstations, to model the game's ships**

experience, with either submarines or surface ships. In fact," he emphasizes, "the men who designed the sonar and radar displays for *688* were the same men who worked on them for the Navy. If anything wasn't accurate, we'd know, and we'd change it."

Indeed, the accuracy had to be scaled back in at least one instance. "Well, we ran the game by the Pentagon, just to make sure we weren't using any classified information, which is our policy. It turned out that one section of the on-disk help, which covered some command structures and tactics, contained information which, while not classified, had been requested by a foreign country, one they didn't want to have the information, or at least wanted something in return for it. So they asked us to alter that portion, so the information could not be picked up for $60."



Modern Submarine warfare is a tense game of passive sonar and painstaking analysis of sound patterns. The use of any active systems broadcasts your position to anyone who might be listening

Players will take on a wide range of both submersible and surface vessels, and deal with some airborne threats, such as anti-sub helicopters. "These are especially dangerous," Castro says, "because currently, no submarine has the capability to counter an airborne enemy. We sent a beta to Paul Grace [Sonalysts's liaison at Jane's Simulations and Electronic Arts], and his only feedback was, 'I hate helos.' "

The main method for avoiding such threats is running deep and taking advantage of thermal layers in the ocean to mask the sub's sonar signature. However, this is exactly how enemy subs will try to avoid the player, which underlines the cat-and-mouse tactics typical of submarine warfare. "What you have to understand," Castro continues, "is that if you use active sonar or radar, you broadcast your position. So modern sonar is based on listening." Sounds are analyzed by the sub's computer for distance and heading, and the type of vessel present can also be determined



A lot of effort has gone into making every mission plausible in the real world



The design team's commitment to utter reality has resulted in only a few breaks in the interest of gameplay, including a few third-person camera views to break up looking at static gauges

from the sound pattern.

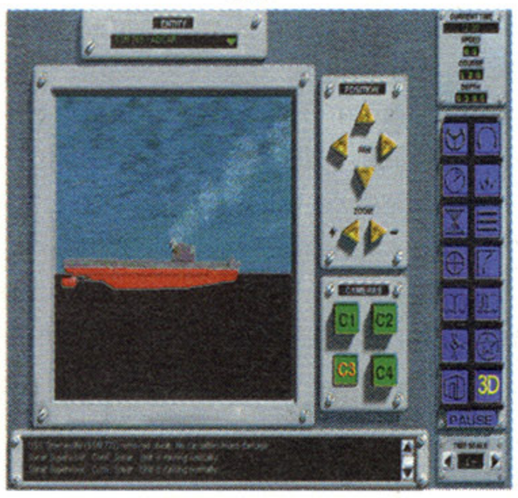
There have been a few concessions to realism however, in the interest of better gameplay. "Yeah," Castro admits, "you can scale the time to 4X or 8X, just so you don't have to wait half a day to reach an objective." A couple of third-person views outside the sub can also be accessed, even though these are not generally available even on the most advanced modern subs. Perhaps the biggest break in "realism" however, is in the game's multiplayer modes: up to eight players can compete over a LAN, either on teams or as a free-for-all.

Players can choose any type of vessel, so a deathmatch between eight 688(I) Hunter Killers is not only possible, but in the design team's experience, common. "It gets pretty hectic," Castro jokes, "although of course it's completely outside reality that this would ever happen."

Of course, the end of the Soviet Union has had far greater consequences than just better military computer games (trust us on this one). However, between companies like Paradigm (the former DOD contractor for high-end flight sims and developer of *Pilotwings 64* for Nintendo) and Sonalysts bringing decades of real military experience to the table, military combat sims will clearly never be the same.

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For the dedicated sub fan, few sims of the last ten years will have the ring of authenticity gamers are likely to find in *688(I) Hunter Killer*. Anyone with even a passing interest would do well to check it out

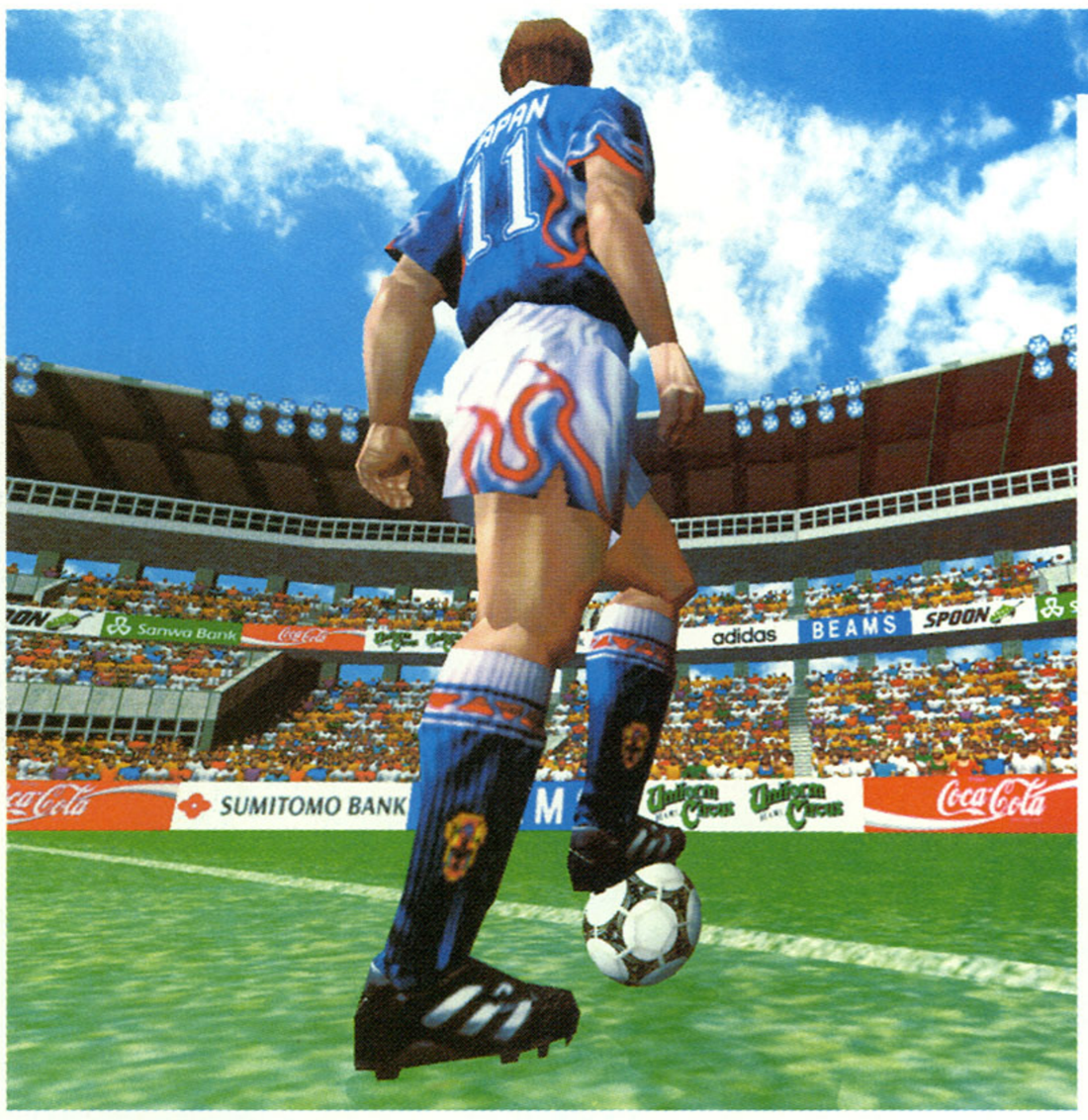
EXTREME (ik- 'strēm) adj: exceeding the ordinary, average or expected.

ASSAULT (ə-'sôlt) n: a violent physical attack.

Blue Byte

Virtua Striker 2

AM2 gets ready to release its third Model 3 title. Guess what? They've still got the magic













The close-in camera angles and highlight reel play have been retained

The prerendered intro screens look good (top left), but they don't look much different from actual gameplay screens (above). Model 3 technology is clearly changing the way we look at games

Format:	**Arcade**
Publisher:	**Sega**
Developer:	**AM2**
Release Date:	**Summer 1997**
Origin:	**Japan**

The power of Sega's Model 3 arcade board was amply demonstrated with the release of *Virtua Fighter 3* and then nicely confirmed by the powerhouse racing game, *Super GT*. The next project to get a boost from Model 3 hardware is *Virtua Striker 2*, a title that shows the AM2 team in full command of its technology.

Six new teams have been added to the game's roster, for a total of twenty-four. Great emphasis has been placed on giving each team a different set of attributes from in the original, and a different style of play as well — some teams are more aggressive, for example. Subtle but very true-to-the-sport differences also occur; certain teams pass more often or show a preference for moving down the right or left side of the field on offense.

However, the most immediately noticeable difference is, of course, the Model 3-powered graphics, and considering how realistic the players and fields looked in the original, that says quite a lot. Not only are the players much smoother and the textures finer and more detailed, but details such as players' shirts rippling have pushed the game into the realm of breathtaking.

Details such as players' shirts rippling have pushed the game into the realm of breathtaking

Virtua Striker is known for its close-in camera angles and fast-paced play, and now thanks to the powerful Model 3 hardware, the motion-captured animation is even



Painstaking attention to physical detail is quickly becoming the hallmark of Model 3-based arcade games

smoother and emphasizes the highlight reel action.

Indeed, the visual difference between the original and this sequel is so striking, it belies the simple truth that little difference in terms of play mechanics exists between the two. Controlling the players was a smooth, intuitive experience in the original *Virtua Striker*, and AM2 hasn't toyed with the basic control scheme.

No one could mistake this series for a true soccer sim, and the arcade feel is important to its enjoyment. Fans of the original should be able to jump right in and find that most of their old skills still apply.

One side note of interest: AM2 is also continuing its growing habit of including prominent advertising for different products in its games. While a number of U.S. and European companies have done this for some time (in fact, Psygnosis was forced to remove cigarette ads from *F1* before releasing the game in the U.S.), it's something of a rarity in Japanese games, especially arcade releases. However, ever since Jacky raised a can of Java brand tea during his victory celebration in *Virtua Fighter Kids*, Sega has been sneaking in more and more product placement. In *Virtua Striker 2*, each stadium will appear just like a real stadium, complete with huge billboards and signs for very real products. Even the ball used in the game is a clearly labeled Adidas AS551 Questra, the ball used by Team USA in 1994.

After exceeding all expectations with *Virtua Fighter 3* and then giving such a satisfying follow-up with *Super GT*, Sega couldn't release a so-so game for the third Model 3 title — although that would have almost been forgivable. However, *Virtua Striker 2* shows that AM2 is far from sitting on its laurels. Indeed, it may very well just be getting into its stride. **ng**





Destined to debut at the Japanese AOU arcade show this spring, *Virtua Striker 2* has definitely raised the bar for arcade sports titles. The only remaining question is can a U.S. arcade owner afford to spend the money it would take to stock such an expensive machine with so few soccer fans around?

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Manx TT

No *Hang-On*, AM3's arcade crotch-rocket looks promising as it speeds to the Saturn





The two new Saturn tracks are "reverse-mirrored" versions of the orginal arcade tracks. Essentially, it's the same as racing the courses backward, only you're going forward



All eight bikes in the game are modeled on real Kawasaki and Suzuki bikes, each of them varying in top speed, handling, and acceleration

Format:	**Saturn, PC**
Publisher:	**Sega**
Developer:	**AM3**
Release Date:	**July**
Origin:	**Japan**

Based on the actual superbike race held every summer on the Isle of Man, *Manx TT* revved it's way into U.S. arcades just about a year ago, complete with a built-in, ride-on motorcycle. "It's a race known for excitement," says Saturn producer Dave Locke. "There are usually lots of accidents." These accidents made the ride-on cabinet perfect for arcade racing fans who liked to lean deep into turns without the fear of eating a face full of actual asphalt at 120mph. While the game didn't make huge arcade waves, it was an enjoyable ride and — if finished properly for the Saturn — should add another feather to Sega's home racing cap.

David Locke says the game will maintain graphics comparable to the arcade version, due in part to a new engine that maintains crisp visuals while keeping a 30fps frame rate.

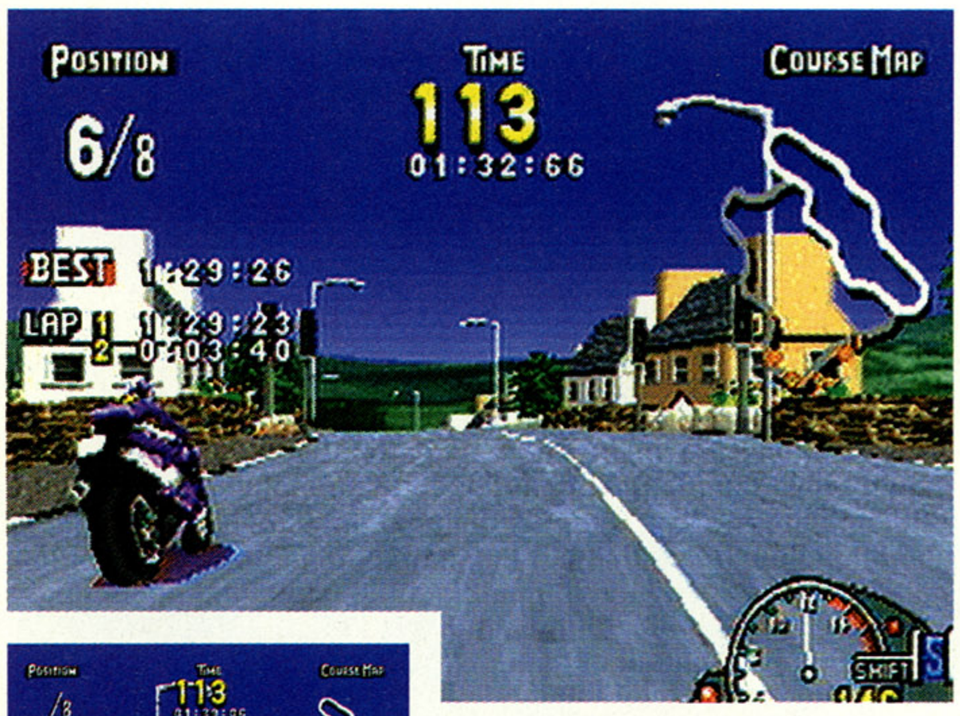






The bikes reach top speeds of between 150 and 160mph, although players will hardly corner at this speed. The speeds shown in these Saturn screens feature readouts in kilometers

ng alphas







Players can select manual or automatic gear shifts

Race against seven other riders from a first-person or chase-view. From the looks of these early screens, the *Manx* scenery should raise the bar for Saturn ports

"This is not the *Daytona* engine," Locke assures. "While it may look similar, we're getting a better frame rate and better graphics. I definitely think this in an engine that will be used in future Saturn games."

Like *Daytona* and *Sega Rally* before it, *Manx TT* is another racer to offer new features for the Saturn. "One obvious advantage is the addition of tracks," says Locke. The two added tracks are "reverse-mirrored" versions of the two arcade originals. Instead of having players race the tracks backwards, Sega has inverted the course paths, then mirrored the scenery to fit. For example, if the course curved hard to the left and then softly right, it's reverse-mirror counterpart would curve hard to the right and then softly left. This may come off as gimmicky when compared to the possibility of newly created courses, but the extra tracks will add some variety.

"You can now choose different set-ups for your motorcycle," Locke continues, "and there are three additional secret motorcycles if you can complete the championship course."

The bikes in the game are all licensed and representative of real Kawasaki and Suzuki models. There are eight selectable bikes (excluding the secret three), each with varying degrees of top speed, handling, and acceleration.

A two-player, horizontal split-

Instead of having players race the tracks backwards, Sega has inverted the course paths, then mirrored the scenery to fit





The Saturn version will offer simultaneous, two-player, split-screen racing



With Sega's analog controller, players can gradually lean into corners with the same precise control of the coin-op's unit



Thanks to the engine, the frame rate of *Manx* is noticably smooth on Saturn, with landscape blurring by at 30 frames per second. While it may not match the arcade, the experience should be quite similar

The sound has already been directly ported from the arcade version

screen mode is planned but not yet working. The sound has already been directly ported from the arcade version, and the game will support Sega's analog control, which enables players to gracefully enter into turns, much in the same way players could gradually lean into corners on the arcade machine. A Windows 95 version is also in the works, set to ship simultaneously with the Saturn version. The game will feature four-player LAN play, and Sega expects that a P75 with 16MB RAM will meet the system requirements.

At press time, Sega estimated i ts Saturn playable demo was about 40% complete. Even this early on, *Manx TT* practically guarantees the same sensation of speed that made the arcade version so gratifying and is already more enjoyable than Saturn's *Hang-On*. Given the success of Sega's recent ports of *Virtual On* and *Virtua Cop 2*, *Manx TT* looks to give the Saturn another needed turbo boost. ng



The TT course is as windy and hilly as in the arcade. When approaching a hill (above), gas it up and catch some air

"You idiots. That was *our* village."

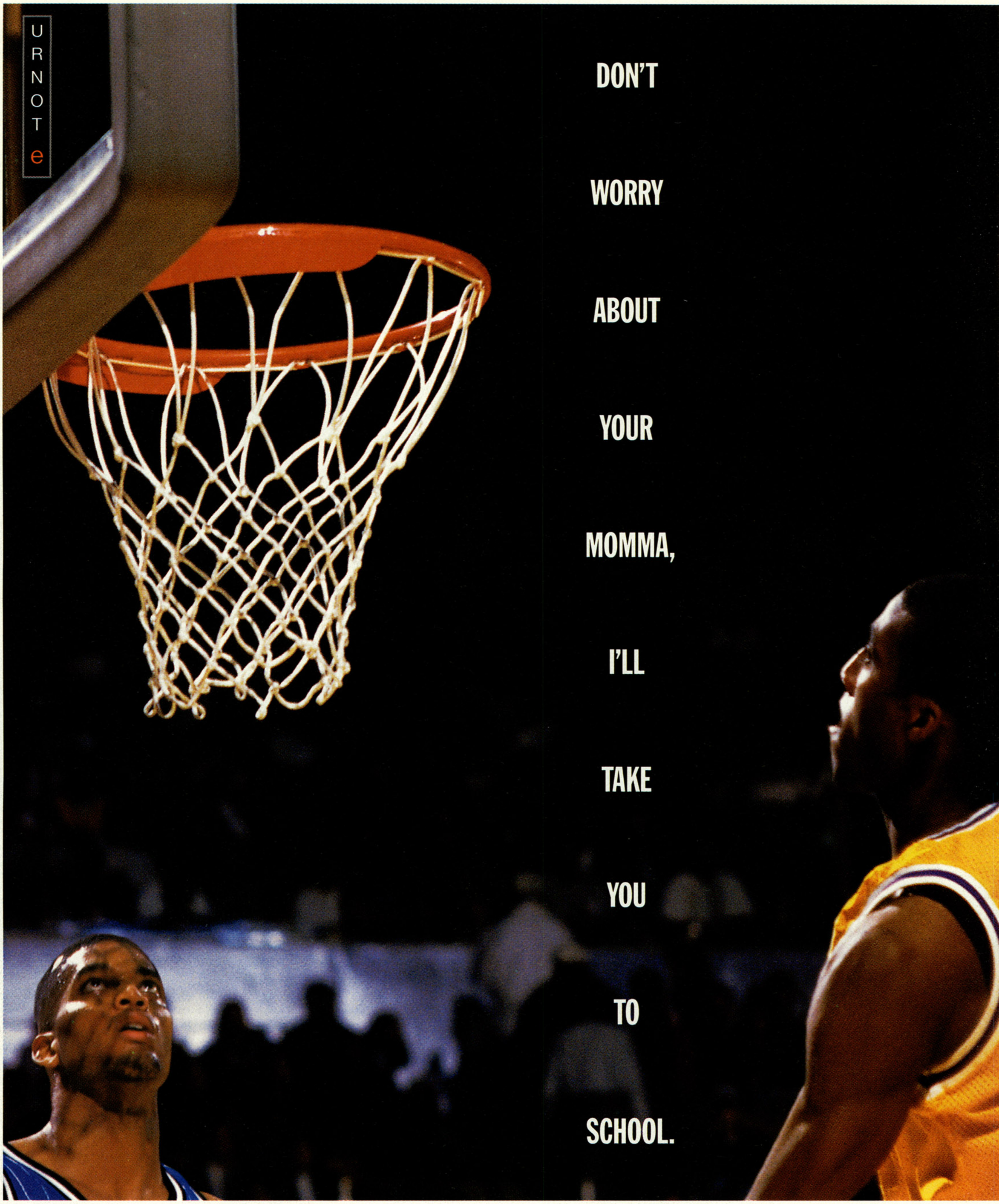


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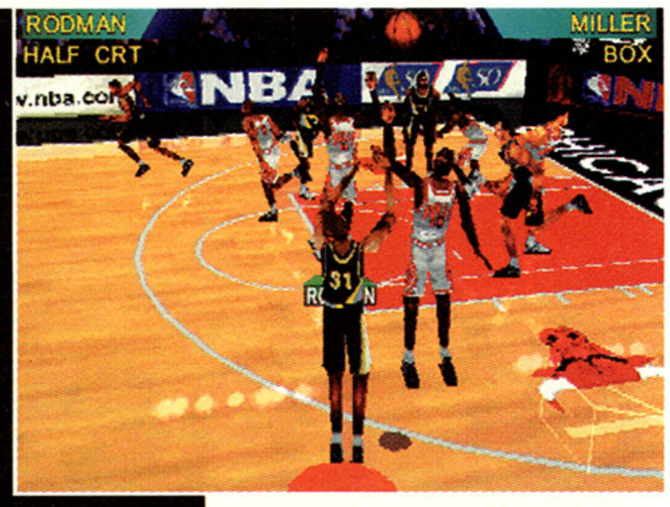
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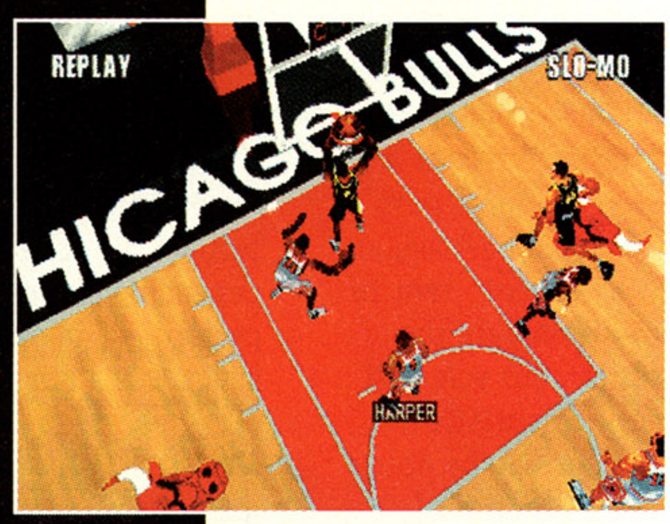
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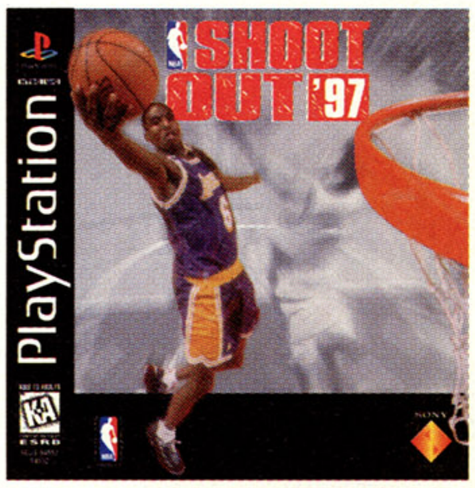






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House of the Dead

Sega's AM1 division harnesses the Model 2 board and the *Virtua Cop* engine for a horror-themed game that's sure to make a splash

Format:	**Arcade**
Publisher:	**Sega**
Developer:	**AM1**
Release Date:	**Summer '97**
Origin:	**Japan**



Next up in the "more gore" sweepstakes is AM1's *House of the Dead*, a rather splattery use of the *Virtua Cop* engine. Set in the '30s and quite deliberately patterning itself after the style of an H.P. Lovecraft novel, the game puts the player in the role of Tom Rowgun.

Toms is a "special agent" sent to a dark mansion to investigate the disappearance of a famous scientist and to look after the scientist's daughter Laura. Naturally, the house is full of bloodthirsty zombies and other nasty critters, which have to be blasted out of the way in order to get to the bottom of the mystery.







Our main problem with the game is that it should be, well, a little more violent



The ridiculous amount of gore is what truly sets this game apart from its *Virtua Cop* ancestor. Enemies in *Virtua Cop* respond differently depending on where they are shot. In *House of the Dead*, this has been taken to its bloody extreme — monsters lose limbs, heads or chests explode, and bodies can have gaping wounds players can see through.

With its interesting gameplay tweaks and over-the-top approach, *House of the Dead* could be a title worth watching for. Unless, of course, you live in Arizona (see page 23).

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The story actually matters to some degree, which is surprising for a light gun shooting game. During breaks between levels, players have the opportunity to make some choices about what direction the story should take, and then play a different level depending on what choice is made. Exactly how many branches the story will have is unknown at press time; regardless, the interactivity still gives *House of the Dead* a greater replay value than the painfully linear *Virtua Cop* series or *Gun Blade*. Further, instead of traditional difficulty settings, the game adjusts itself depending on how well the player is performing, and the storyline shifts slightly as a result of this as well.





Take on the armies of darkness and protect a cute girl. It sounds good to us



Although one could argue that *House of the Dead* is Sega's entry in the post-*Resident Evil* horror bandwagon, it nevertheless represents an interesting new direction for its arcade division. The game puts an older engine to good use for a very different gameplay experience

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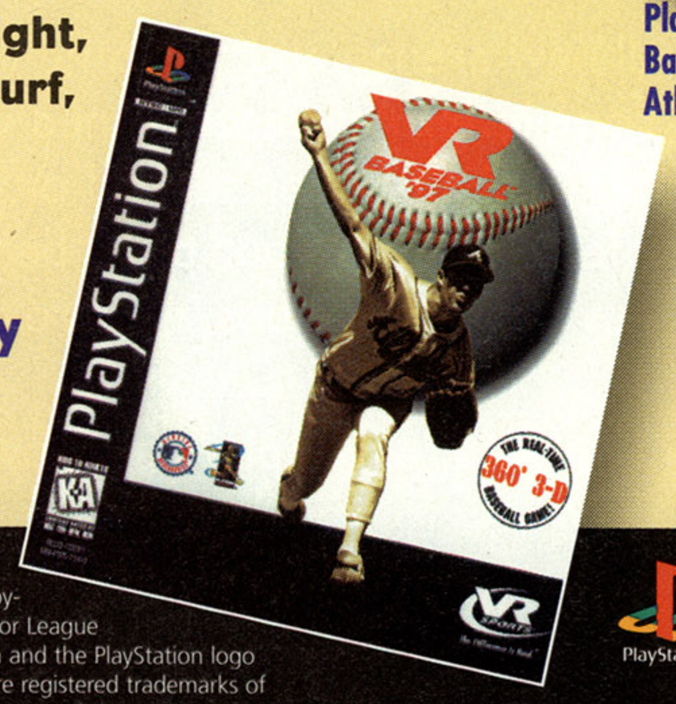
After 3 years of internal development and a total commitment to quality, VR Sports delivers a winning roster for the '97 season:

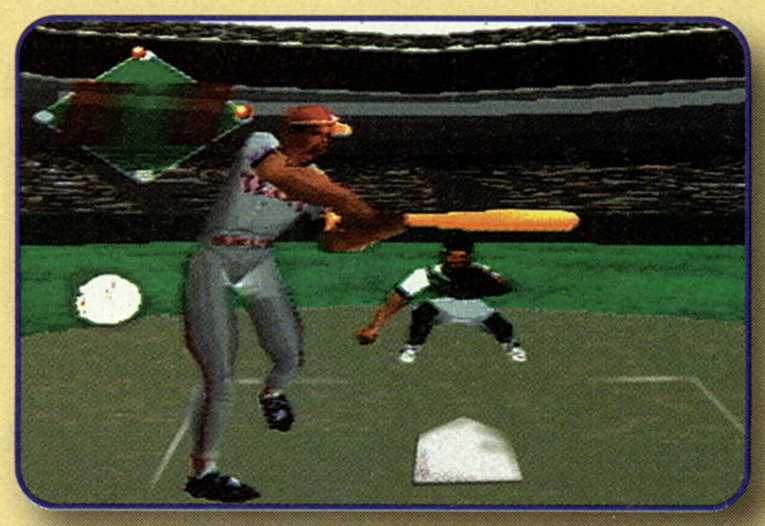
- **Instant access to pitch selection, speed and control for unlimited plate locations without menus. Total bat control for power, contact, bunt and pull-hitting without tipping your hand to your opponent.**
- **Hit and run, tag up, steal, stretch out a double or execute a squeeze play. It is up to you because you can control all of the baserunners while simultaneously controlling the batter.**
- **Super-fast Season Play mode with top 10 or full stats. Plus, mid-season All-Star voting and game.**
- **Four uniform options per team including updated colors and team logos for 1997. Plus, four play options and three difficulty settings for the skill level most challenging to you.**

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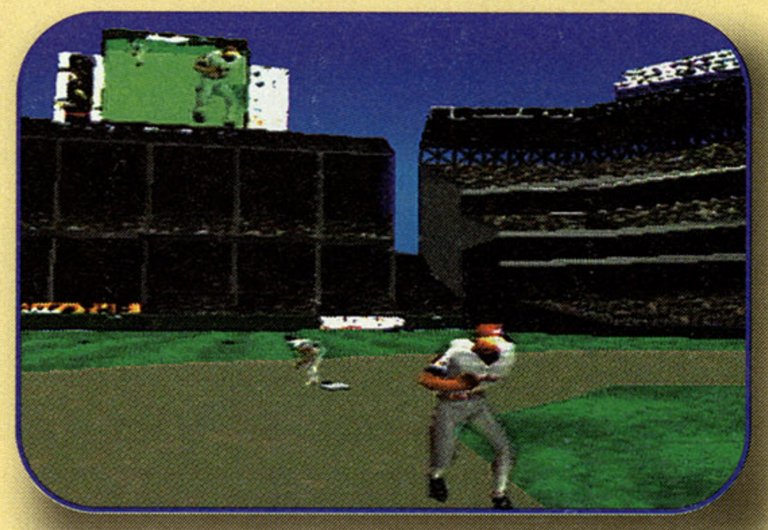




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PLAYMATES INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT PIE®

The creators of *Dark Savior* branch out in more ways than one with a game that should let players run anywhere they want, anytime

Runabout







The premise is simple: get from point A to point B in the alloted time. The catch is that the quickest way there might be blocked off, so an alternate route may have to be found. Hey, if you don't like the way we drive, stay off the sidewalk

"It's a driving game, not a racing game"

Kan Naito, President, Climax

Format:	**PlayStation**
Publisher:	**Yanoman**
Developer:	**Climax**
Release Date:	**Summer '97**
Origin:	**Japan**

Climax is known for developing such action/RPG hybrids as *Landstalker* and *Lady Stalker* for Genesis, and most recently, *Dark Savior* for Saturn. This makes *Runabout* a doubly radical departure for the developer: not only is the game not an RPG, it's not destined for a Sega platform.

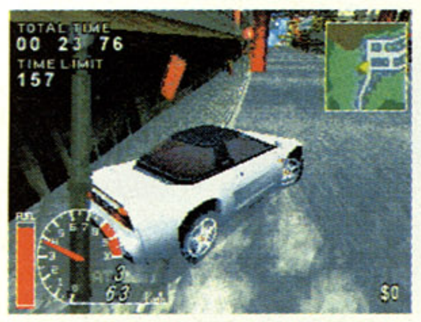
It's not your conventional racing game, either. In fact, Kan Naito, president of Climax, insists, "It's a driving game, not a racing game." The idea is not to race against other competitors, but to race against time and reach the goal before the clock runs out. Further, there is no set track. Instead, as the title implies, players are free to go anywhere they wish, finding their own best routes through each area, with no holds barred.



You can lumber through LA's Chinatown, looking for short cuts. Hmm, that fruit stand looks like it hides an alley — flatten it

Players can choose from among 22 different vehicles, including the expected roster of sports cars, but also vans, scooters, buses, and even a garbage truck. While at first this might seem an odd selection of cars, the method in the madness becomes clearer once players understand the game's mechanics, which owe as much to Psygnosis's *Destruction Derby* series as to *Ridge Racer* and its ilk. Vehicles take a fair amount of damage from collisions and lose performance as a result. Further, the hazards players encounter include the expected buildings and cars and police patrols, which can be powered through if the player's vehicle is stout enough to do the job (which





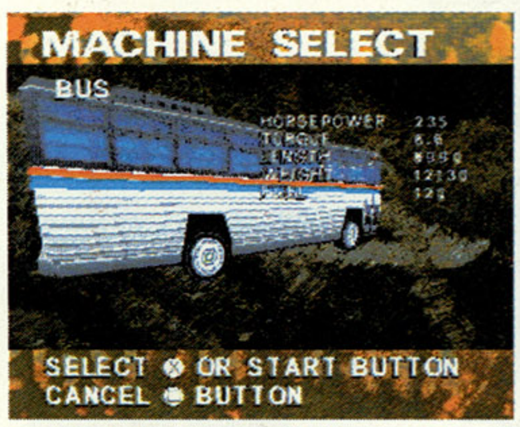


The game's physical model owes more to *Destruction Derby* than *Ridge Racer*

ng alphas

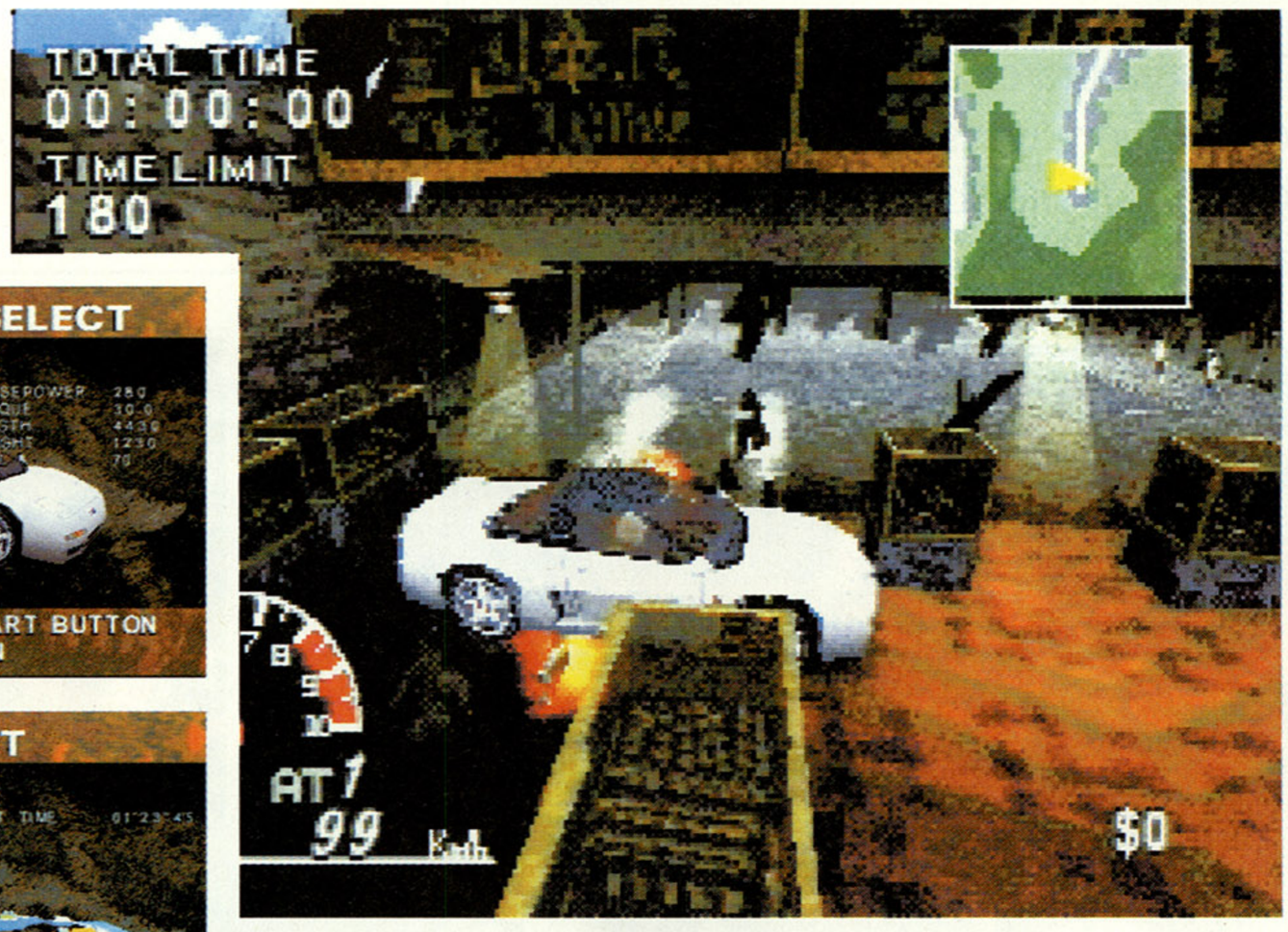








Players can choose from 22 different vehicles, from a Vespa scooter to a Porche. Try a Greyhound bus and re-enact your favorite scene from *Speed*



In *Runabout*, players have the option of driving anywhere they wish, at any time — provided it gets them closer to the end









The game offers a variety of terrains and obstacles in its three stages

suddenly makes the garbage truck not seem like such a bad choice).

The nature of the game is open-ended. *Runabout* is divided into three stages, the first of which is set in the cramped streets of L.A.'s Chinatown. The design work in this area (and indeed, the whole game) is highly detailed, and the crowded streets practically force the player to drive on the sidewalk, through open-air cafes, hotel lobbies, and small homes. L.A., like every stage, features numerous different road surfaces, and different cars handle in different ways, enabling players to tailor their routes according to their individual driving styles and choice of vehicles.

The second stage is set in the Shonan area of Japan, a place famous for its seaside resorts and its traffic jams. Traffic piles up randomly each time a new game is played, so different routes must be found each time. No problem; if the road is blocked, just head across the beach.

The final stage is set in Paris at night. Here the streets are especially narrow, and the traffic harrowing. (Parisians, apparently, feel no compulsion to obey any traffic laws whatsoever.) Shortcuts in Paris include running through the underground Metro.

In the long run, *Runabout*'s significance lies in it being the first non-RPG, non-Sega-platform title from Climax. Fans of Saturn and the *Dark* series don't have to worry though, as the developer still has a number of Saturn titles in the works, and no other announced PlayStation games. According to Kan Naito, "A game such as this is simply easier to produce on PlayStation." Climax's previous games have been released in the U.S. through Sega, so it is questionable who might pick it up in the U.S., or if it will even be released here at all. We can only hope so.

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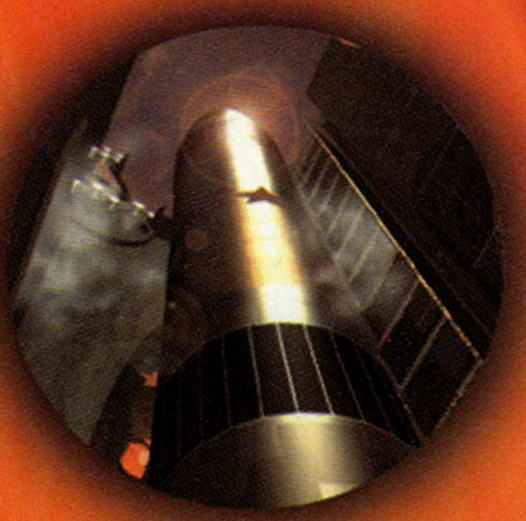


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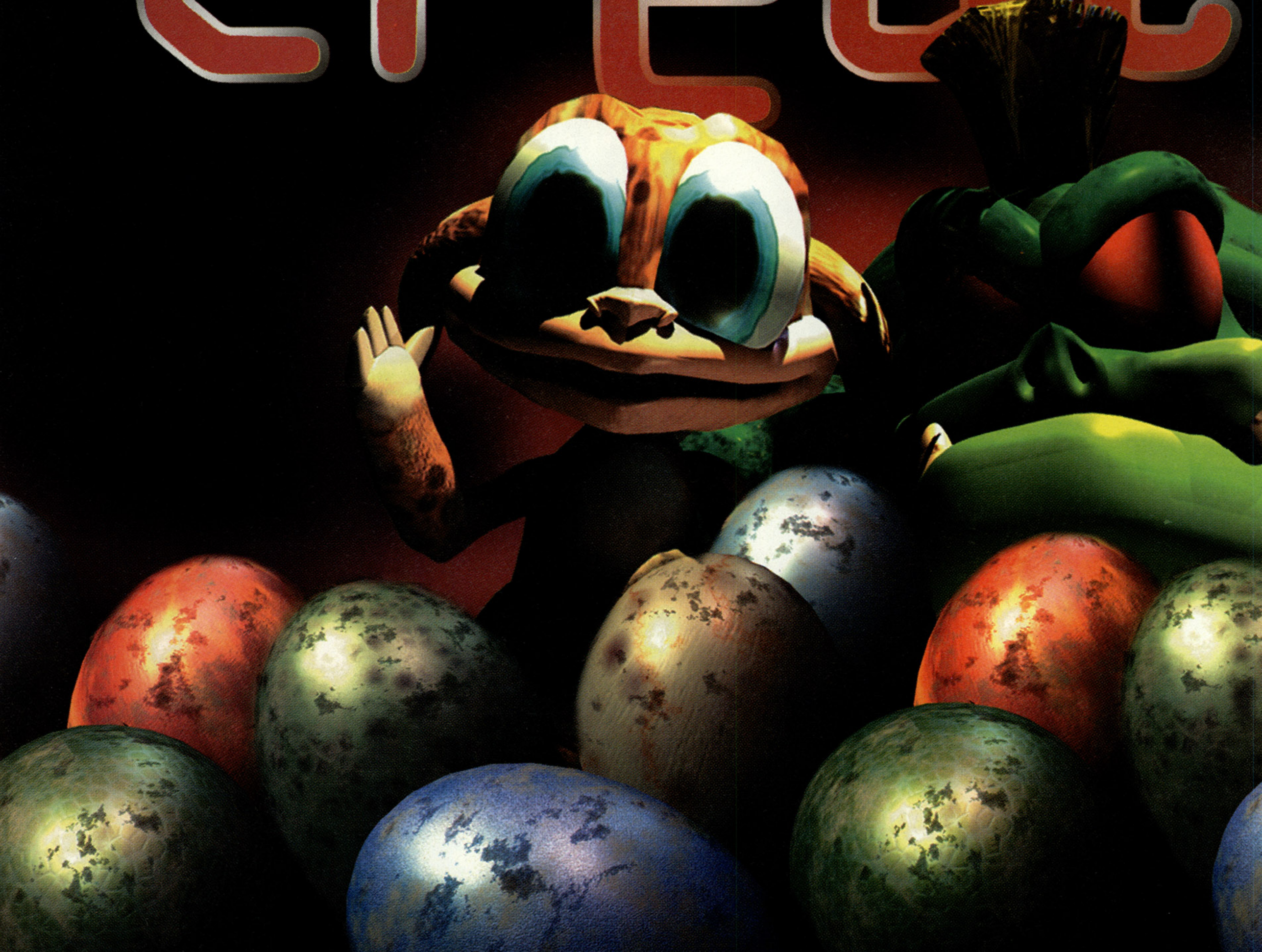
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Innerloop

Next Generation connects with a team of Norwegian developers who are on the verge of a real-time breakthrough









Even those experienced with the latest PC flight sims will be impressed by what Innerloop has achieved with its 3D engine. Beautiful undulating landscapes stretch into the distance, creating previously unseen levels of realism. The snowboarding (left) and buggy (top) demos look impressive as well. The six members of Innerloop (above) pose in for a picture in the crisp Oslo winter sun

The PC real-time graphics field is unique in that it sees new developments occur with alarming regularity; the state of the art is seemingly being reset approximately every six months. Despite the undeniable achievements of developers such as Id, Epic Megagames, and 3D Realms, not all the breakthroughs are being made in the U.S. **Next Generation** recently flew to Oslo, Norway, to get the first look at a new engine whose creators claim — just as all creators of new 3D engines do — it's better than anything that has gone before it. There is no game to speak of, except the gaming concepts employed to show off the engine. Upon arrival **Next Generation** didn't meet a game, but a team of ex-hackers and demo coders and got a glimpse of the future of real-time PC 3D.

At Innerloop's offices, there's a sense of technological one-upmanship that suggests that what they have achieved will make waves in the PC development community. It appears that such confidence won't go unfounded. Rather unenticingly known as Iterated Functions Systems (IFS), the technology relies upon a relatively new form of mathematics that has only recently broken out of the realms of theory into practical application. Basically, it renders a polygon landscape as far as the eye can see with no visible performance hit no matter how much detail it throws at the screen — even when what is being viewed effectively represents millions of polygons. Team

"It's not actually millions of polygons per frame, but it amounts to the same level of detail"

Henning Rokling, Innerloop

The low-res VGA mode Next Generation was shown does not look substantially different from the high-res versions

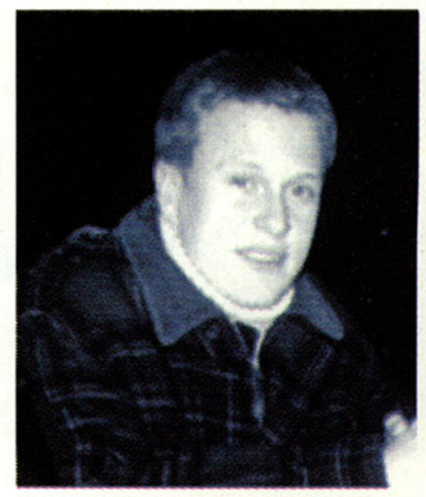
leader Henning Rokling explains: "It's not actually millions of polygons per frame but it amounts to the same level of detail. Usually you have all sorts of 'pasting in' in the distance, but that's not very effective and we don't do it. We have fogging just for effect, because that's what terrain actually looks like."

What impresses most about IFS is the way the engine draws the landscape far into the distance. Next Generation saw it running on a fairly lowly P120 in a defined SVGA mode greater than 320-by-240, and yet it sustained a frame rate of 30fps with a breathtaking depth of vision. Innerloop is reticent as to the exact workings of its engine, but the key is a set of algorithms that effectively means that every coordinate of the huge landscape is precalculated and can be accessed immediately. The system combines and connects faces and vertices while supporting a huge terrain and multiple effects. The results are plain to see: landscapes that stretch for miles and unravel seamlessly with no build-up and use of hidden fogging.

Even more surprising is that Innerloop's huge textured world fits onto a single floppy disc. Everything is designed to reveal more detail the closer it appears to the camera. Planes appear on the horizon as a few pixels but are formed from 700 polygons when up close (they even cast proper undulating shadows on the landscape, since the engine has all the terrain information at hand). Thousands of trees are scattered across the hills, each composed of numerous polygons, and the ground textures do not even distort up close. Conversely, the player can fly away from the ground and, after shooting through realistic 3D clouds, is then able to see a geographically accurate outline of the country below.

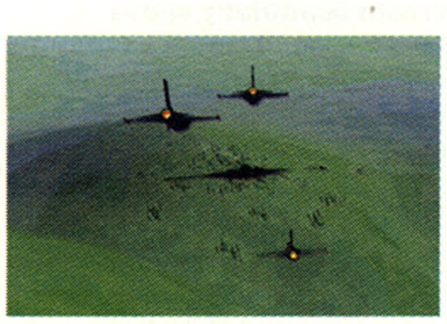
"The main difference is the way that the data is stored," continues Rokling. "It isn't saved as polygons or surfaces in a normal 3D mesh but as parameters and textures in a kind of mathematical function. We have random access to every single point on the map and can zoom in on a map. Also, you can travel several thousand miles in one direction and then return to the same place, and when you get back it will be exactly the same."

To showcase the technology, Innerloop is currently working on a flight simulation game that will be ready towards the end of the year — its potential for all manner of 3D games is

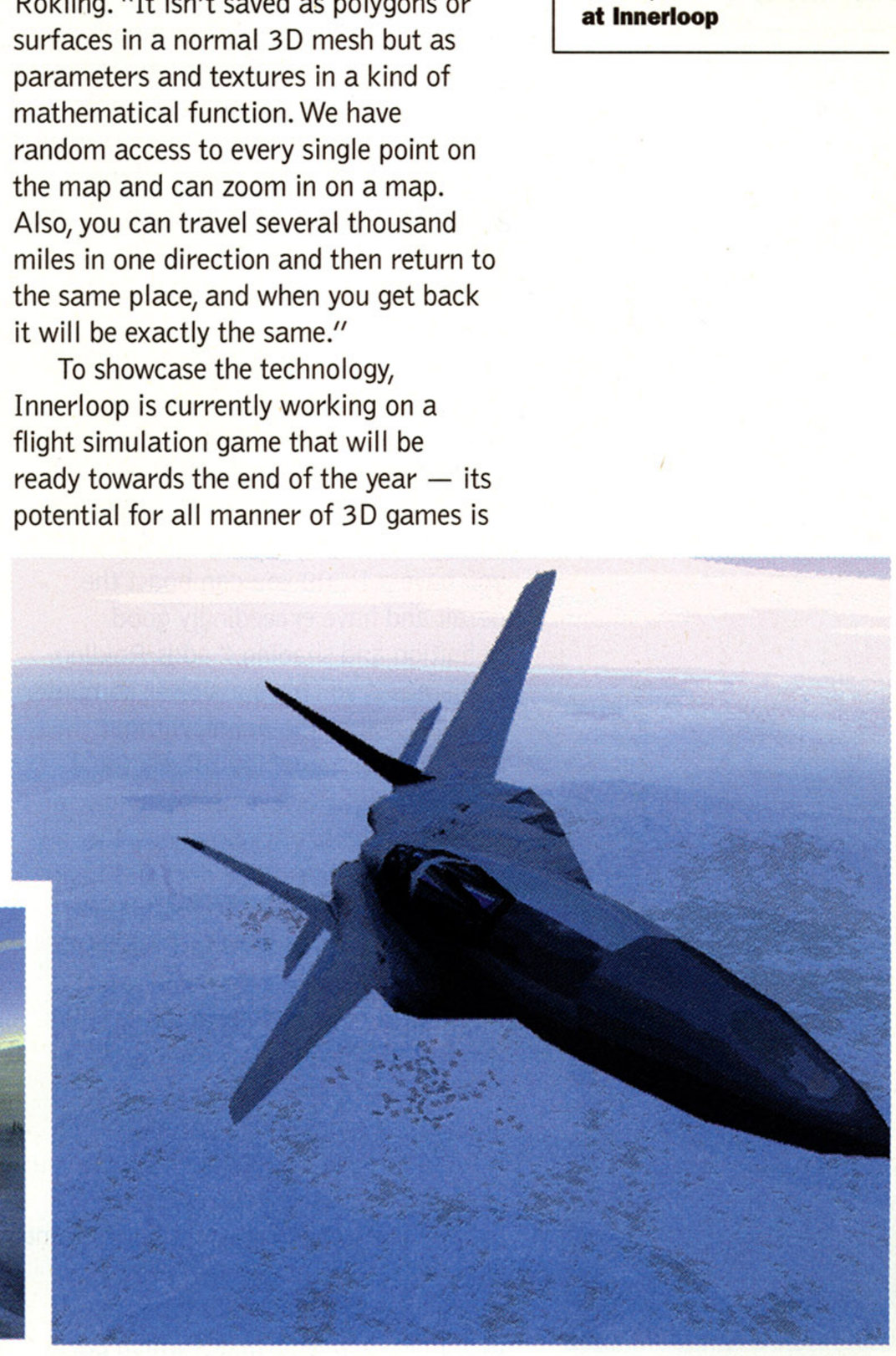


Henning Rokling, pictured above, is the team leader at Innerloop





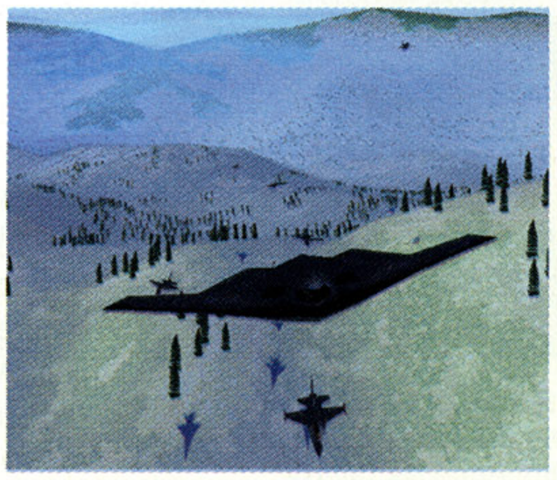




Currently, only the flight simulation is destined to be a marketable title







Highly detailed models (such as the center plane, above) are made up of about 600 to 700 polygons, while other use far less. At higher altitudes it's actually possible to see the curvature of the earth. The engine even draws the landscape far into the distance, and the huge textured world fits onto a single floppy disc

ng alphas



Henning Rokling pictured at his workstation at the Innerloop offices in Oslo, Norway

enormous. The key to this diversity is several proprietary world-building tools that construct authentic and artificial landscapes with ease. **Next Generation** is shown how it is possible to edit the landscape with the custom world builder, adjusting the height of the mountains and generally manipulating an impressive 3D world in real time, but the team is keen to keep the nuts-and-bolts of the tools a secret. "Anyone who makes a 3D engine would want to make it as simple as possible, and this one is really simple," says Rokling. "But all the complexity lies in creating the tools and the database so that 90% of its ingenuity is in finding the data and reading it."

Despite running astonishingly well on a low-end Pentium, Innerloop's technology will also benefit from an accelerator card which will simply enable the drawing of more polygons to the screen at greater resolutions. "If you have a P200 you can boost the detail and have exceedingly good definition and shading," adds Rokling, "whereas if you have a slower computer you can reduce the detail, without affecting the gameplay, merely the appearance." However, refreshingly for a state-of-the-art development, the low-res VGA graphics mode does not look substantially different from anything that has gone before. "Most games in low-res look really crap," concedes Rokling. "This, however, actually looks good. It's running fast with lots of colors. Everything looks very smooth and yet it's in low-res. It's hard to tell from looking at the terrain because you never get the same pixel twice."

The issue of terrain detail does come with limitations and is obviously dependent upon RAM. To get around this, Innerloop determines which parts to spend the RAM on. If San Francisco's bay area was modeled, every player would want to fly over or under the Golden Gate bridge, so the team will devote more space and time to making this more realistic. Where the technology will really shine is in joining different types of terrain without sudden unconvincing changes.

But this is all well and good for the PC. What about consoles? Surely this technology could also be applied to run on machines such as the PlayStation?





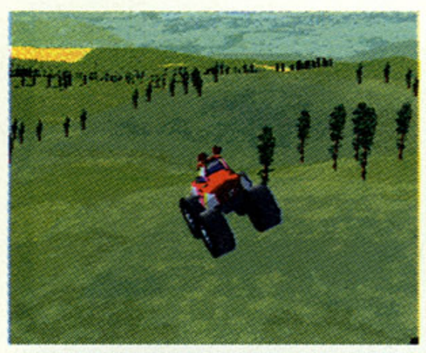
The snowboarding portions of demos Next Generation saw promises to take the player through some breathtaking scenery. If anyone should be able to create beautifully snowy landscapes, it would be natives of Norway, and Innerloop definitely has the right credentials

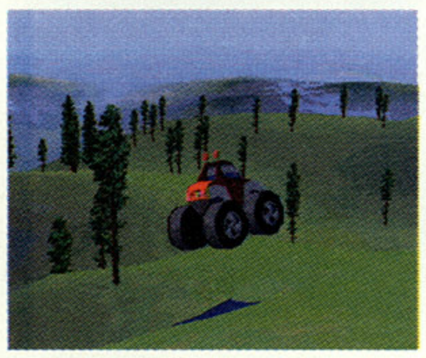
"We talked about this and it would be possible," reckons Rokling, "but we would have to lose a couple of pixel features, and we would have to reduce the size or the number of textures. If we actually made a landscape without any features — that is, no airports, snow, specific coastal outlines, no anything — it would take 200K, which still gives about the same quality when it comes to the texture of the ground."

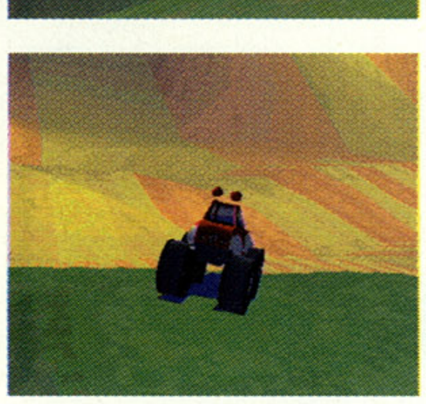
The potential for Innerloop's technology to be licensed must be an enticing one to other developers. After all, progress in the development of external landscape engines has been slower than those limited to confined environments — mainly because technology has always been the limiting factor. Now, a game like the 16-bit Mike Singleton classic *Midwinter* could actually be constructed in a believable world. *Command and Conquer*-type games could exist entirely in 3D and skiing games could exist in a landscape made up of 500 different slopes.

"Ultimately what we've created would suit a driving game, an off-road game, or even a skiing game or a bike game," concludes Rokling, "but really you can create any kind of land-scape. There is no limitation." ng

The key to this diversity is several proprietary world-building tools that construct authentic and artificial landscapes with ease







The sense of scale created by the buggy demo is truly breathtaking (above). Distant hills are clearly visible and aren't just included for effect

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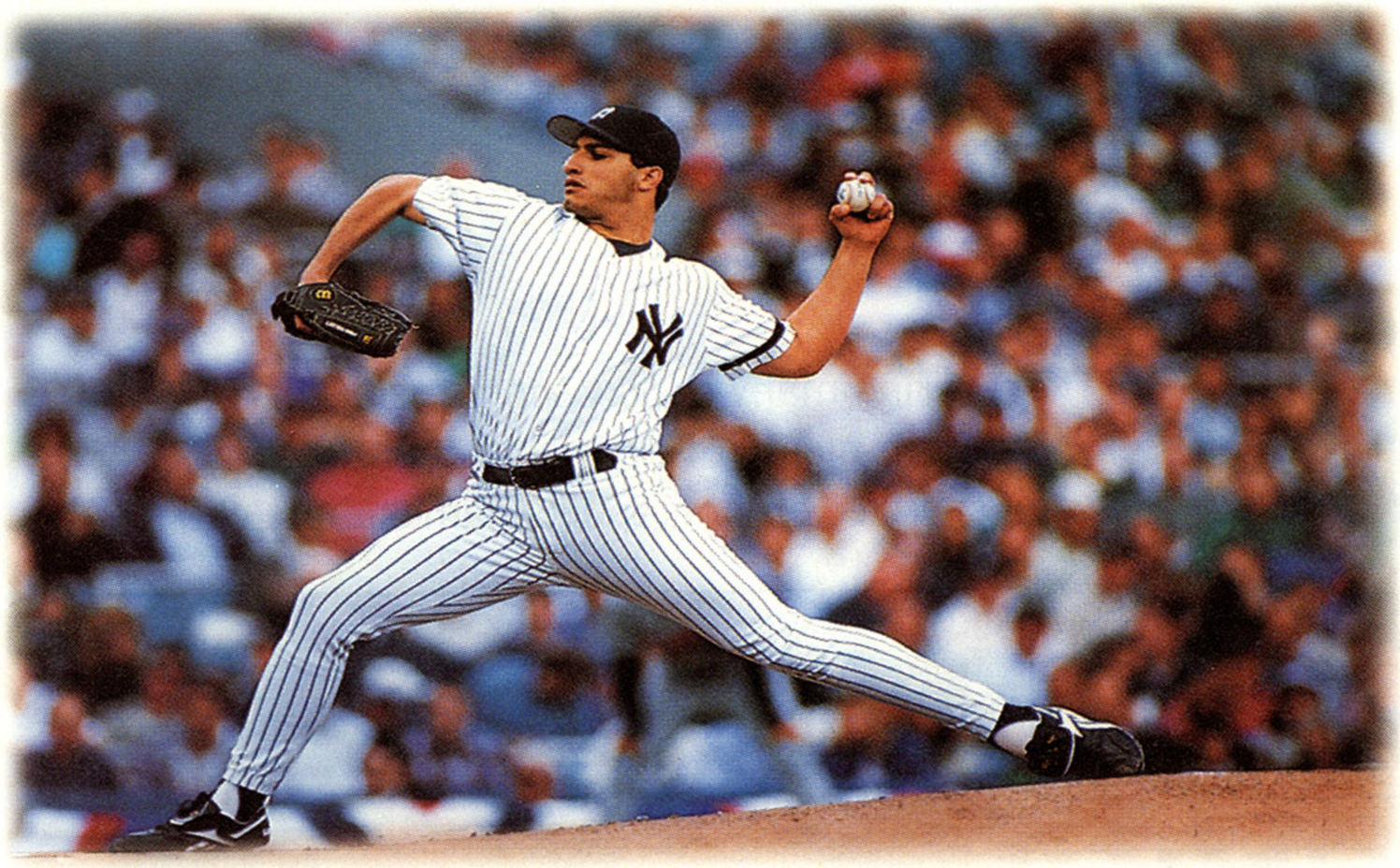
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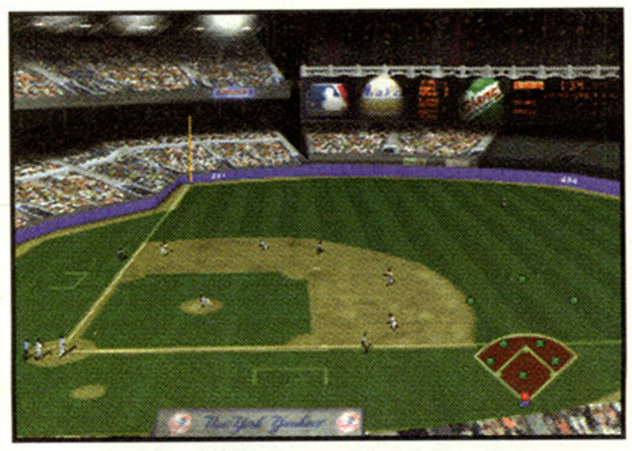
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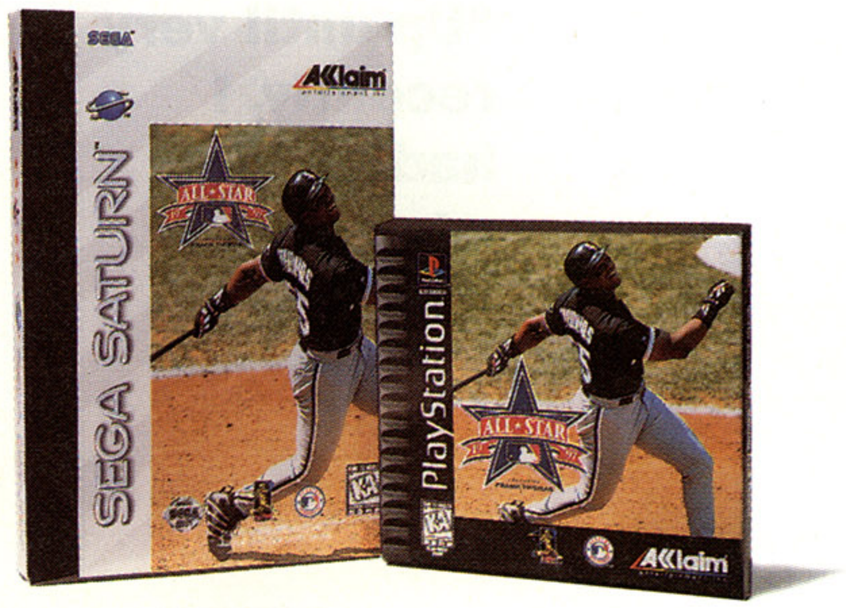
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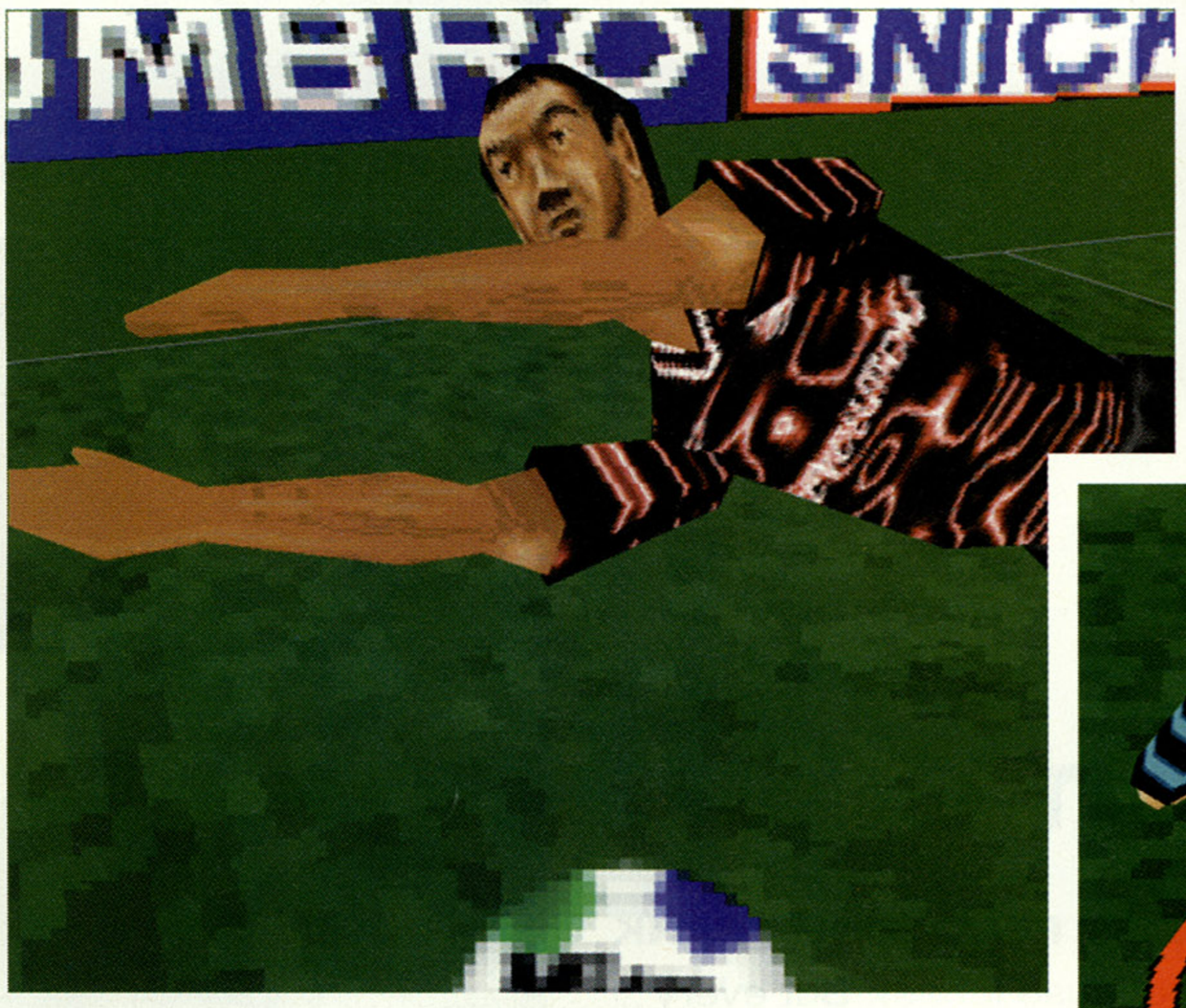
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Major League Soccer

Featuring many ex-EA sports veterans, Z-Axis has both plenty of experience and fresh a perspective on how sports games must change







In addition to the MLS license, New England Revolution defensive star Alexi Lalas and offensive dynamo Eric Wynalda of the San Jose Clash will endorse the game. The players are already sporting the new season's uniforms, even the names are legible on the back of the jerseys

During a meeting with BMG and Z-Axis, **Next Gen** found itself staring across a table at four veterans of EA Sports. Is going up against the might of their former employers intimidating?

Don Traeger, BMG's VP of global product development and the man who previously launched EA's entire sports division, touches on this.

"People have said to us, 'you guys are crazy for doing sports,' " he concedes. "But we're all passionate about sports; most of us have experience and a successful history doing sports. Besides, no category anymore is a cakewalk."

Enter *MLS*, the latest national sports league to grace the U.S., and the inspiration behind the first sports product from the BMG/Z-Axis pairing. Traeger recognizes the risks associated with licensing a new league but says he likes how the league is organized. "Up until very recently," he muses, "I had no idea what FIFA meant. I would guess that the majority of American kids have no clue, but they all play soccer. With the advent of *MLS*, we feel we have the first meaningful U.S. soccer license."

Format:	**PS-X, Saturn, PC**
Publisher:	**BMG**
Developer:	**Z-Axis**
Release Date:	**August 1997**
Origin:	**U.S.**



With "accelerated motion-blending," *MLS* attempts to alleviate the sluggish control associated with motion captured characters

The team at Z-Axis, with its front-row season tickets to the San Jose Clash, couldn't agree more. "It comes down to two things," says Gordon Bellamy, creative director for Z-Axis,

"Up until very recently, I had no idea what FIFA meant"

Don Traeger, VP of development



Players are well detailed; brands of shoes (as well as faces) are recognizable

"gameplay and partnering with the real sport. You must address these two issues well to make a great sports title."

Bellamy firmly believes *MLS* is going bring the next generation of sports gaming home. "We want to put more control into the hands of the player," he says. As Z-Axis is a "sports only" development house, it focuses to the extreme on the problems that have traditionally dogged sports games. Bellamy boils the gameplay difficulties down to control issues and how fair the game is. "Sports gamers know how a competitive game can be undone by tricks or holes left in the gameplay," he says. "No matter how spectacular your graphics, how big your license, or what you've done, poor gameplay can undo the enjoyment."

The team explains that *MLS* will feature dynamic, intuitive control that anyone can pick up and play, empowering players with many moves to make good or bad soccer choices. "We aren't heading far down the *Street Fighter* road," Bellamy presses. "We're not merely catering to the people with advanced control skills."

Traeger finds many current soccer titles isolating, a problem he hopes to correct with *MLS*. "There's never been an awareness," he says, "that your teammates are rushing down the field beside you, in a formation to execute these intelligent plays. Traditionally, games have been pass-to-yourself, pass-to-yourself, shoot. That's not soccer, that's graduate *Pong*." Subsequently, Z-Axis is implementing on-the-fly play calling, with plays straight from *MLS* playbooks.

The game is in simultaneous development for PlayStation, Saturn, and PC (a P133 is recommended for PC players). The PC version will support analog joysticks, enabling the players to accurately control the speed of on-screen characters.

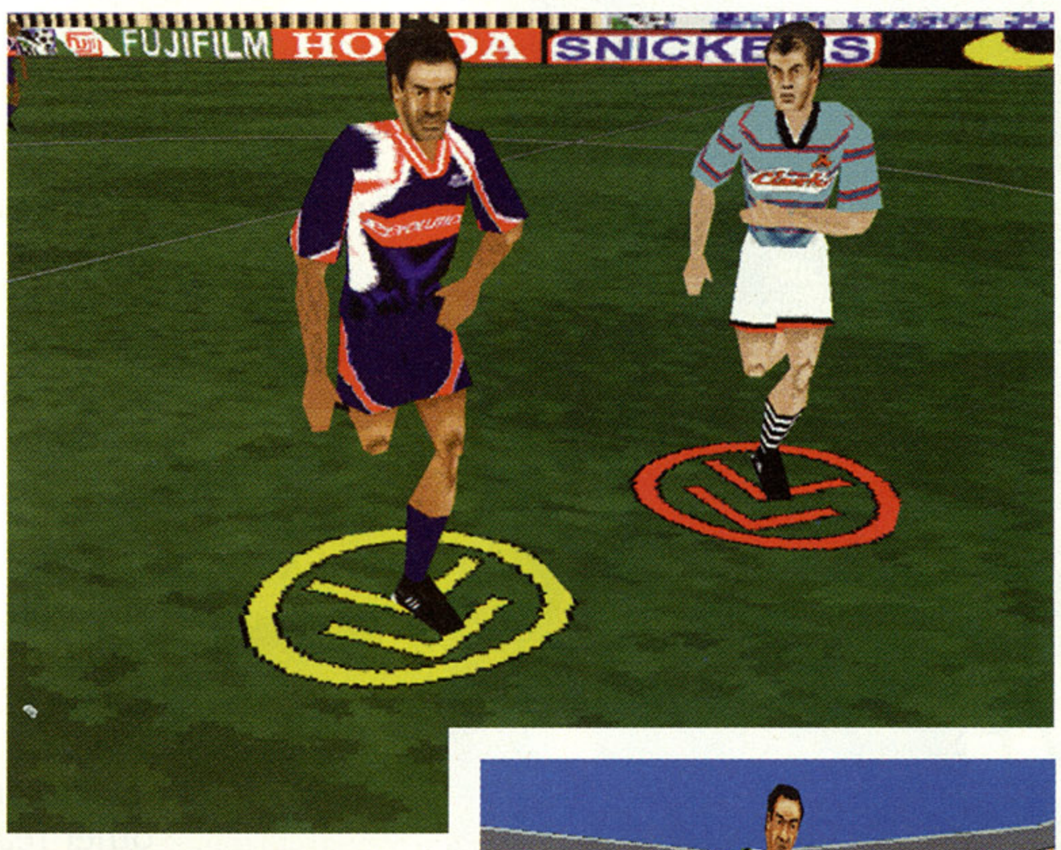
Z-Axis is hesitant to talk at length about its new features, noting that the competition is probably reading. As of press time, the audio was nowhere to be heard, only faintly echoing from a room Next Gen was not shown. "It's still in development, and we aren't talking about that yet either," Bellamy says while others fall silent around him. "But, it's gonna sound like you're on the field."

Come August, soccer fans will be hoping that the field lives up to their dreams.

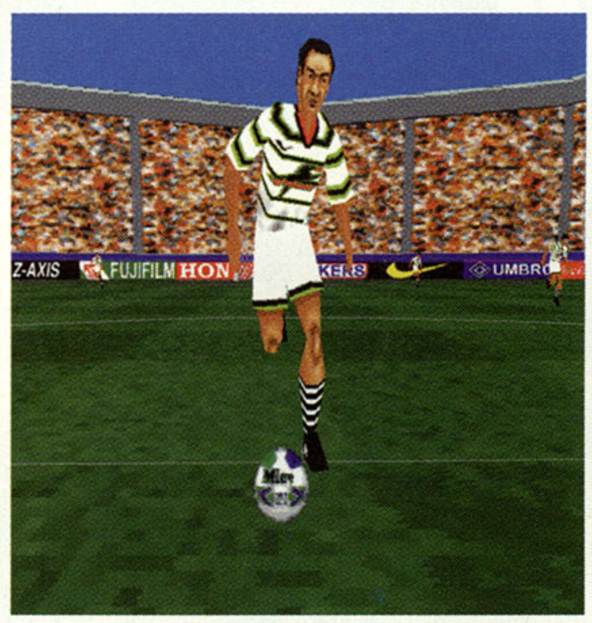
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"Traditionally, games have been pass-to-yourself, pass-to-yourself, shoot. That's not soccer, that's graduate *Pong*"

Don Traeger, VP of development







MLS animation will offer a great sense of visual cues. Players can kick with either their inner or outer foot — the two will look distinctive

Dribbling will be more realistic in *MLS* and not as "magnetic" as in other soccer games

The second season of MLS is in the game — the teams, logos, and players

Calendar of Events

IMAGINE GAMES NETWORK

Thurs MAY 1

Core Interview
PSXPower interviews the guys at Core to find out about their upcoming games, including Ninja and Tomb Raider 2.

Fri MAY 2

Hand Held Gaming
Ultra Game Players takes a look at portable game, past, present and future. Classics from the past and new ideas for tomorrow.

Mon MAY 5

Beat Doom 64
Don't miss the Doom 64 Walk-through and Strategy Guide. A complete, downloadable guide through all 30 levels of Midway's most recent game.

Tue MAY 6

boot Reviews
All Boot's latest reviews will be launched onto bootNet.com. Make sure you're ahead of the PC market.

Wed MAY 7

The Perfect Game
You vote for the greatest game of all time in Ultra Game Players Special Poll. We'll pool your votes, decide on a winner and let other readers see why you voted for the "ultimate game".

Thur MAY 8

The History of SEGA
SaturnWorld chronicles the recent chapters. From the 32X to Virtua Fighter 3

Fri MAY 9

Game Censorship Forum
What role, if any, should the government play in the gaming industry? Voice your opinions in a Special Forum set up by Next Generation Online.

Mon MAY 12

Have Your Say
How would you improve PSXPower? Send us your suggestions into this Special Forum and you could win $300 worth of PSX games.

Tue MAY 13

IGN Debate
The editors at N64.com, SaturnWorld, and PSXPower debate the most recent issues effecting their consoles. Text and streaming audio versions available on all three sites.

Wed MAY 14

Where is M2?
Ultra Game Player's expose on the rise, fall, rise and whatever of the most elusive console the gaming world has never seen.

Thur MAY 15

Talking PC Games
Chat with the PC Gamer Online editors in the IGN Palace.

Fri MAY 16

Win Cool Stuff
SaturnWorld is giving away plenty of Sega goodies in this mammoth contest.

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Every day, one of the seven sites in the Imagine Games Network hosts a special event. These include interviews, chat forums, downloads and extra features.
And they're all absolutely free.

All you have to do is to check the times and the dates of the events, and make sure you're there to enjoy them. You'll find the urls of all the sites at the bottom of this page.

Mon MAY 19 — **Monster Demo Deployment**
Five new demos for PC and two for Macintosh will be added to Next Generation Online's ever-growing demo section.

Contest
Affiliate site PlayStation Nation will hold a week long contest to win a copy of Rally Cross and a Negcon.

Tue MAY 20 — **Five Day Compo**
The N64.com FIFA Soccer '97 Contest starts today. It's a five-day event with five different questions, in which the winners receive a free FIFA Soccer '97 cartridge

Wed MAY 21 — **Exclusive Preview**
Sneak Peak - PSXPower takes an exclusive look at one of the hottest new games. Screen shots and movies available for down-load. This is the big one!

Thur MAY 22 — **Duff Game Systems**
Jaguar, 3DO, Vectrex - they're gone but not forgotten. Enjoy Ultra Game Player's huge feature exposing the lost systems and the games you'd all forgotten. Why did they fail? Where are they now? Where can you still buy one?

Fri MAY 23 — **PC 3D Board Exploration**
What's the best 3D board for you? Next Generation Online explores some of the new entries to the market.

Mon MAY 26 — **boot Previews**
See a panoply of Boot previews on bootNet.com. For PC addicts only.

Tue MAY 27 — **Tour a Major Game House**
Take an interactive tour with PSXPower of one of the indus-try's biggest games companies. Movies, screen shots, and text available.

Wed MAY 28 — **Saturn Sports**
Get a complete look at the Sega sports world with SaturnWorld's in-depth feature.

Thur MAY 29 — **Challenge the Team**
Play X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter against the PC Gamer editors (details will be announced on PCGamer.com).

Fri MAY 30 — **Mid-Year Round-up**
N64.com analyzes and critiques the games from January-June 1997, and forecasts what's in store for in the upcoming months.

All events begin at 6pm PST

MAY

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NG 1 • Out of Stock

NG 2 • Shigeru Miyamoto interviewed • Saturn: The complete story so far• Gaming online ("Joyriding") • Revival of the Fittest: Why is retrogaming so big?

NG 3 • Sega's Tom Kalinske quizzed • Does PlayStation live up to the hype? • What's wrong with the PC? (part one) • Game music feature

NG 4 • Nolan Bushnell (the founder of Atari) interviewed • Atari: from boom to bust, boom again (and then bust again) • Gumpei Yokoi (inventor of Virtual Boy) quizzed • What's wrong with the PC? (part two)

NG 5 • Sony's Steve Race interviewed • Nintendo 64: The Story So Far • Apple: The Ripe Stuff. The story behind Apple's Pippin

NG 6 • Peter Molyneux talks gameplay • M2: 3DO bites back? • PlayStation's Disciples: How PS-X games are made

NG 7 • Sam Tramiel: Atari talks back • What has 3DO achieved so far, and what is its future? • Electronic Entertainment Exposition (E^3) — the 1995 show report

NG 8 • Howard Lincoln: Why the hell has Nintendo delayed Ultra 64? • Sega Saturn: What the TV commercials don't tell you • Japanese RPGs: coming to a game machine near you

NG 9 • Which 32-bit system is EA on? An interview with EA's Bing Gordon • Reality Check: The Future of Virtual Reality • Saturn: Sega's battle plan

NG 10 • Is this the end of FMV as we know it? An interview with Digital Pictures' Tom Zito • Feature: Do videogames screw you up? • A report on Motion Capture

NG 11 • Yu Suzuki, head of Sega's AM2 arcade division talks arcade • The Top 75 movers 'n' shakers in the gaming industry: who *really* wields the power? • Mind Games: the rise and rise of artificial intelligence in computer games

NG 12 • Chris Crawford — videogaming's self-proclaimed "Prophet in the Desert" interviewed • Head to head: each and every game machine rated and compared

NG 13 • Sega's Tom Kalinske explains why Saturn can still win the war • 1995: the year videogames changed forever

NG 14 • George Zachary explains Nintendo 64 • The world of Videogame Marketing: How Sega and Sony get into your brain

NG 15 • Sony's Marty Homlish talks about his 15 minutes • The **NG** Lexicon: gaming terms, from A to Z

NG 16 • An interview with the Dave Perry • Plus, How to get a job in the game industry

NG 17 • So Howard, why is Nintendo 64 delayed again? • Future Joysticks — how force feedback will change the way you experience videogames

NG 18 • World exclusive: Bill Gates talks about Microsoft, games, and the rise of the PC • What's Microsoft's game? • DVD: Friend or Foe?

NG 19 • Brian Moriarty on how online, multiplayer games could help you get laid. • Online Gaming: What's the real future? • *Nights* — the making of Yuji Naka's 32-bit masterpiece

NG 20 • Nintendo, Sega, and Sony all under one roof • Is *Super Mario 64* any good? • Nintendo 64: 20 reasons why it could fail

NG 21 • The top 100 video and computer games of all time (it's the most controversial feature we've ever done) • Interview with Williams' Eugene Jarvis on retrogaming

NG 22 • 3DO's Trip Hawkins — he's back, and claims that PlayStation, Saturn, and the entire 32-bit generation is dead • Can Apple compete with the big guns?

NG 23 • An interview with Mr. Teruhisa Tokunaka • *Sega Touring Car Championship* revealed • Artificial Life — how a new generation of gameplay is evolving

NG 24 • The Big Fight: Which console is the best? Nintendo 64, PlayStation, and Saturn • David Rosen reveals Sega's roots. • Atari's Historic Road to Nowhere • The future sound of game music

NG 25 • Make PlayStation games with Sony's new Yarouze system • Interview with Claude Comair, director of Digipen, the Canadian gaming school • Sneak peek at *Super Mario Kart 64*

NG 26 • *Unreal*, a preview • Interview with Shigeru Miyamoto • Videogame Myths • PC cards

NG 27 • Top 10 Online Gaming Sites • Interview with Origin's Richard Garriott • It's *Bomberman*!

NG 28 • Revival of the Fittest: A look at retrogaming • Interview with Senator Lieberman • *Super GT*

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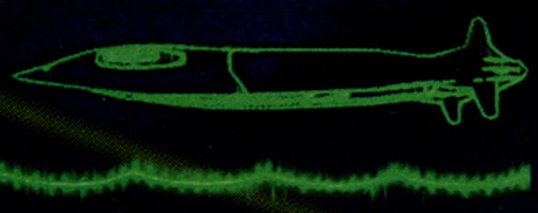
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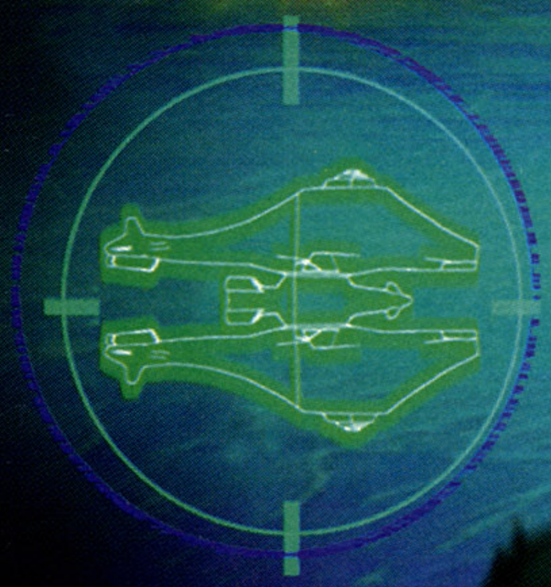
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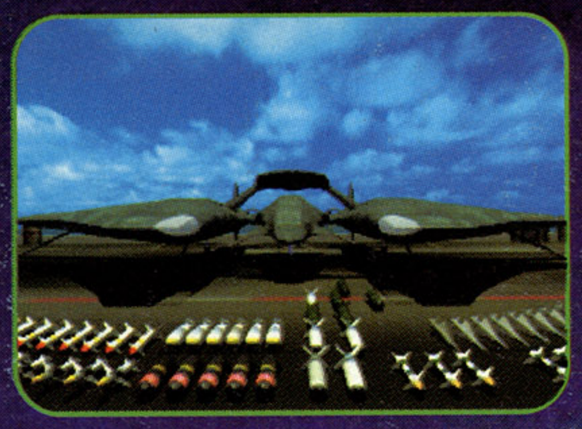


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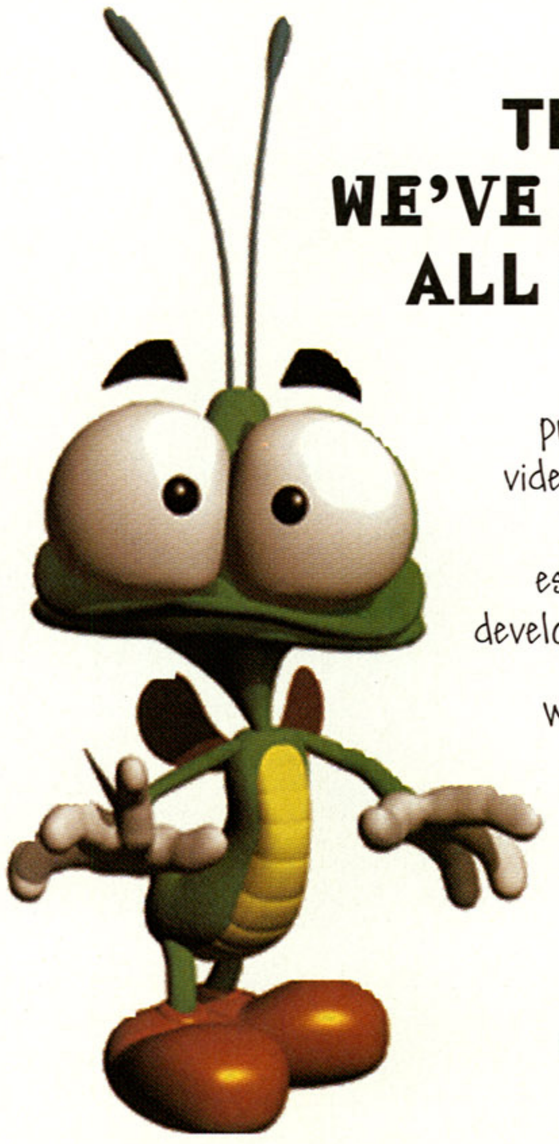
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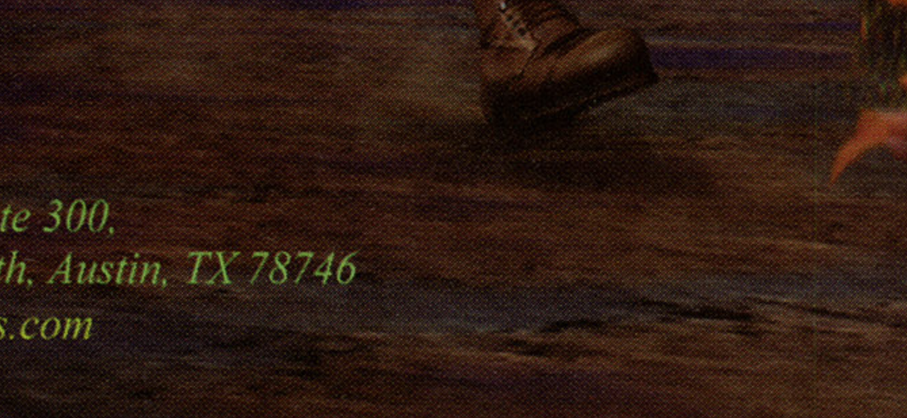
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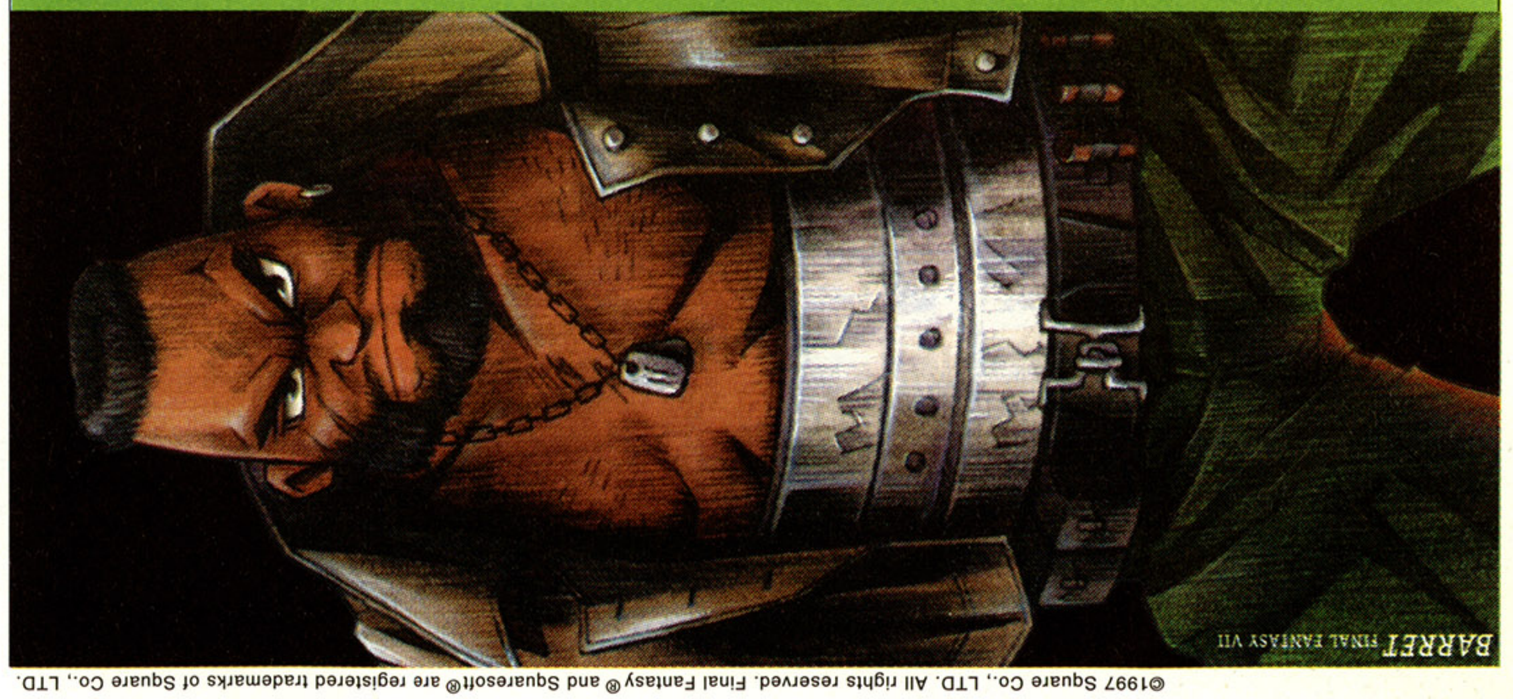
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Doom 64 Nintendo 64 **Vandal Hearts** PlayStation **Command & Conquer** Saturn **Jetfighter III** PC
Cruis'n World Arcade **Descent Maximum** PlayStation **Hexen** Saturn **Privateer 2: The Darkening** PC

finals

Games — we play 'em, then we rate 'em for you

142 Nintendo 64
144 PlayStation
150 Saturn
154 PC
158 Macintosh
158 Arcade

Each month, **Next Generation** does the research for its readers. We review and rate the month's new game releases. Our opinion as to each game's merits is expounded in the text, but as a rough guide to a game's worth (or lack of it) then refer the following ratings.

★★★★★
Revolutionary
Brilliantly conceived and flawlessly executed; a new high-water mark.

★★★★
Excellent
A high-quality and inventive new game. Either a step forward for an existing genre, or a successful attempt at creating a new one.

★★★
Good
A solid and competitive example of an established game style.

★★
Average
Perhaps competent; certainly uninspired.

★
Bad
Crucially flawed in design or application.

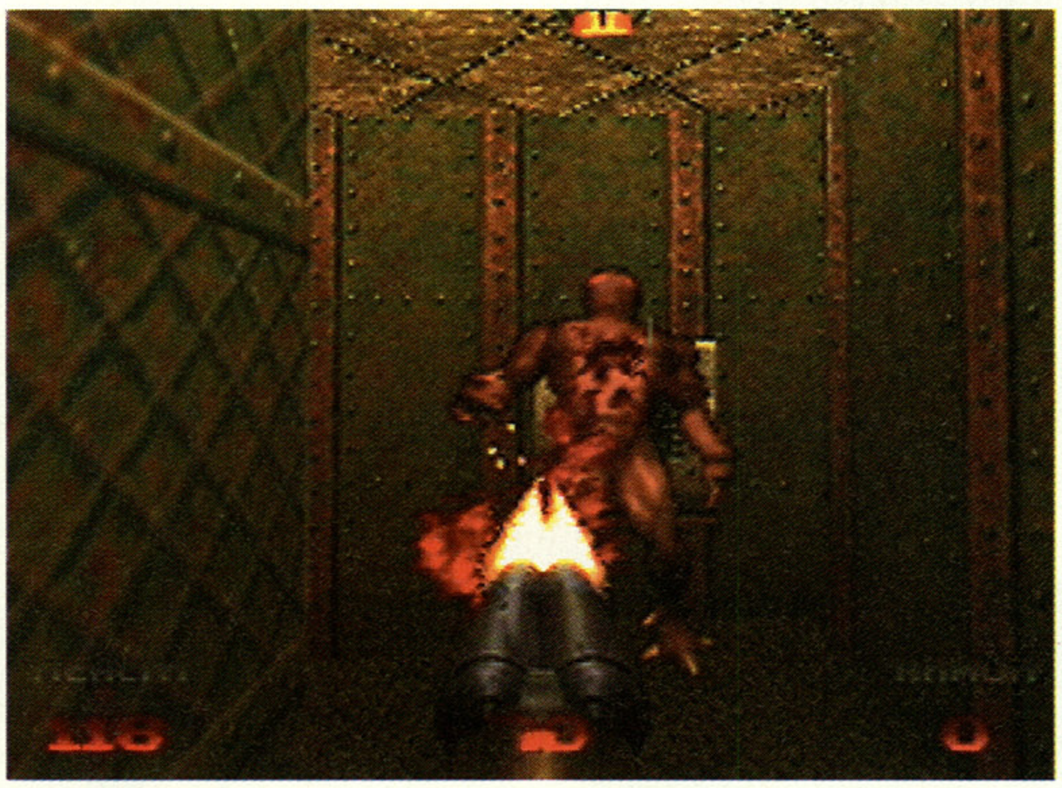
Nintendo 64

Doom 64
Publisher: Williams
Developer: Williams
The most powerful gaming console for 3D games gets a crack at the most influential 3D game of all time. You'd think this would be a marriage made in heaven, and in a large part it is, but little things keep *Doom 64* from being perfect.

On the up side, this is easily the best-looking *Doom* yet. Nintendo 64, with its mip-mapping, perspective-correct textures, and bi-linear filtering simply makes the graphics shine — or not shine actually, since this is also the darkest, grimmest version of *Doom* yet. Every polygon is rock solid, and the enemies we've come to know and fear have been given CG facelifts. The frame rate is high, and if you'd squint a little you'd almost swear you were running down real corridors.

The level designs (all the work was done by Williams, with little or no input from Id) are lethal — even the most skillful *Doom* fans will have their hands full. And pushing door switches often causes whole rooms to rearrange and fold out into new shapes.

On the other hand, the polygon power of Nintendo 64 seems to have made the designers a little too ambitious. Nearly every corridor features odd, extraneous alcoves or pillars jutting from the walls. While at first it's a nice change from the bland, flat hallways found in other versions of *Doom*, it's way too easy to get hung up on these in the heat of battle.

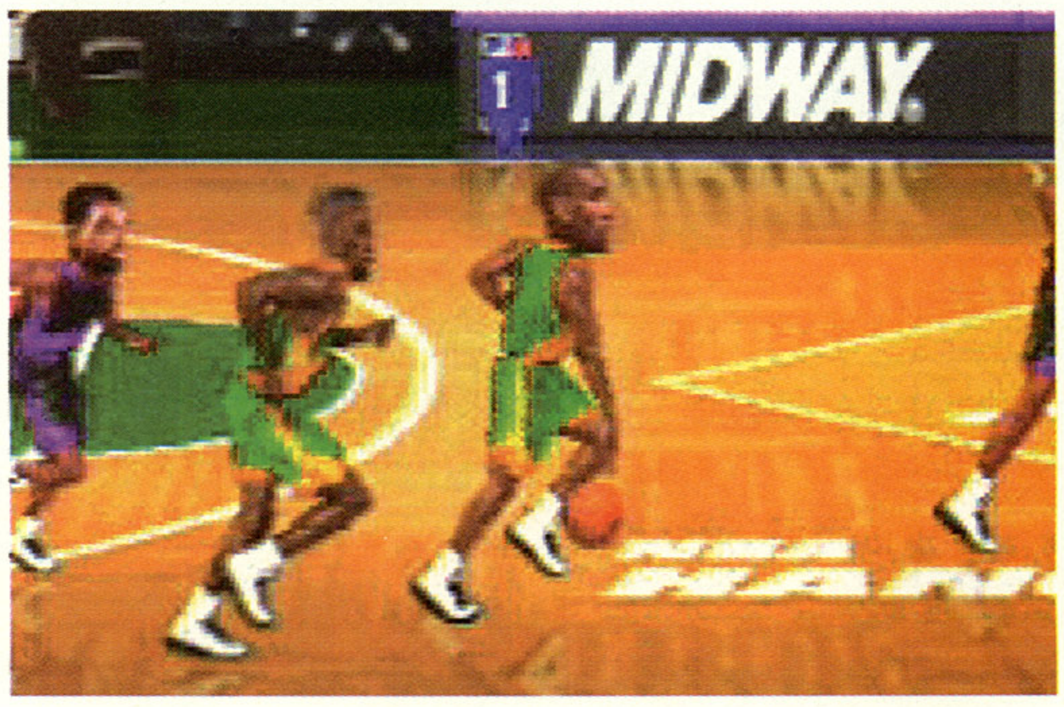


***Doom 64* may be the best-looking *Doom* ever, and it certainly has its challenging moments, but it's mostly more of the same**

Further, while the enemies have been re-created as prerendered sprites, they're still just sprites (occasionally they also partly disappear into walls, as if Nintendo 64 can't quite z-buffer sprites correctly — go figure). In the end, *Doom* 64 is just *Doom* (although not Id's *Doom*) with better graphics. While that may be good enough for some, to us it's starting to show its age.
Rating: ★★★

NBA Hangtime
Publisher: Williams
Developer: Midway
Even though *NBA Hangtime* was made by the original creators of *NBA Jam*, they couldn't legally use the *Jam* name. However, the lawyers couldn't stop developers from using the same exact engine and nearly identical gameplay.

Basically, if you've played *NBA Jam*, then you've played most of *NBA Hangtime*. Features such as create-a-player, fade-aways, and dribbling maneuvers give the player more control than ever before and are new to *Hangtime*. However, none of this really makes much difference since the usual shove, dunk, and snore-fest quickly returns. The four-player action of *Hangtime* is its saving grace, especially on Nintendo 64, where the readily available four-controller ports make multiplayer gaming extremely simple. Beyond that, *NBA Hangtime* has no right calling Nintendo 64 home: the simple 2D sprites and digitized heads don't use half the power available, and the poor frame rate is just unforgivable. Basically, the far inferior Super NES houses a version that looks as good as and plays even better than Nintendo 64's because of



Look familiar? *NBA Hangtime* uses all the power of Nintendo 64 and still looks similar to *NBA Jam* made four years ago

Oh, my.



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its more user-friendly controller.

You could certainly do worse things with your Nintendo 64 than enjoy a four-player game of *NBA Hangtime* (try *Cruis'n USA* for one), but remember that you could buy a Super NES and a copy of the original *NBA Jam* (which is still better than *Hangtime*) for nearly the same price as this cart. Of course, that assumes you really want more of this kind of dated, boring gameplay.

Rating: ★★

Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey

Publisher: Midway
Developer: Atari Games/Midway

The first sports title to bless Nintendo 64, *Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey*, is solidly fun with entertaining multiplayer possibilities and a broad enough range of gameplay for all kinds of hockey fans.

Gretzky is packed with an awesome choice of options. The game's arcade mode offers a fast, high-scoring game nearly identical to the arcade version, and its sim mode follows a strict set of principles for more demanding hockey fans. The sim mode makes scoring goals tough and enforces more rules, but it's not really a simulation as much as it is a low-scoring arcade mode. Fanatical hockey fans will be disappointed, as more realistic and finer-tuned hockey games on other systems easily outdo this one. Another weakness is that the goalies — all of them — suck. It's as if they're playing on a different level than the other team members, and this renders a one-player game something of a joke since you can practically score at will. Still, the two-on-two multiplayer (in a five-on-five game) option is great fun.

The game's graphics are smooth and almost flawless. Collision detection is nearly spot on, and the physics — the players' movements on the ice — are dramatically real. Pucks and players bounce off objects as they would in real life, and players can't rush across the ice at god-like speeds as in other games. Overall, the motion-capture conversion from Wayne Gretzky's actual movements were skillfully translated into polygonal models and completed with finesse.

True hockey aficionados will lift up their noses, but more action-hungry players will find *Gretzky* worth the money, if only because its multiplayer capabilities are a blast, the arcade mode is fast, and the fights, well, they just come with the territory.

Rating: ★★★



***Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey* is the first Nintendo 64 sports game to use the four-player options. Each player is bulit from a model of the Great One**

PlayStation

Crusader: No Remorse

Publisher: Origin
Developer: Origin

Origin's near-classic *Crusader* series has been lighting up PC screens for the last three years and is one of the few console-style action titles for the PC. The gameplay is top-notch, the graphics are great, and the storylines are even cool. Now Origin has released the first in the series, *Crusader: No Remorse*, for PlayStation, and the action is everything you could expect.



***Crusader: No Remorse* loses only a fraction of its ease of control from the PC original. Otherwise, considering the game is closer to traditional console fare, the intense action and smooth gameplay have been retained**

Crusader takes place in a futuristic, isometric world where an evil corporation is oppressing the local citizenry. You control a renegade Silencer making your way through various government facilities while killing guards and civilians with impunity, blowing things up, and generally making a nuisance of yourself.

At the start of each mission, you are given a task such as stealing plans or destroying a generator. The mission is usually completed by simply reaching the end of a level, but getting there is neither quick nor easy. The missions are huge, usually taking hours to complete, and filled with weapons, ammo, and secrets to uncover. Plus, everything blows up — computers, crates, and civilians all explode in pyrotechnic glory. However, Origin wisely uses the carnage as a pleasing supplement to the gameplay, as opposed to making it the focal point.

The only fault with *Crusader* is its control, which translates poorly from the keyboard. While the movement is simple enough, four actions have been mapped to each button — and you thought *Twisted Metal* was complicated. Luckily, most of the extended actions are unnecessary, so you can immediately forget two-thirds of the controls.

Overall, *Crusader: No Remorse* is a first-rate conversion. Everything good about the original has been retained on PlayStation. The game is long without being tedious and makes for plenty of entertaining evenings.

Rating: ★★★★

Descent Maximum

Publisher: Interplay
Developer: Parallax Software

As an early *Doom* clone that introduced true 3D movement, *Descent I* and *Descent II* were favorites of PC gamers when the first-person perspective shooter still seemed fresh. Last year's release of *Descent* for PlayStation featured classic gameplay, as well as the light-sourced (but pixelated) graphics, that marked its tenure on the PC. *Descent Maximum* expands on game elements added to the PC version of *Descent II* and features just enough improvements to the aging series to make it a welcome addition to the fold.

The most noticeable improvement in *Descent Maximum* is in its graphics, with more attractive textures and less pixelization. Nobody will mistake *Descent Maximum* for anything else, but the graphic quality has finally achieved an acceptable home-console level. The game control has improved slightly



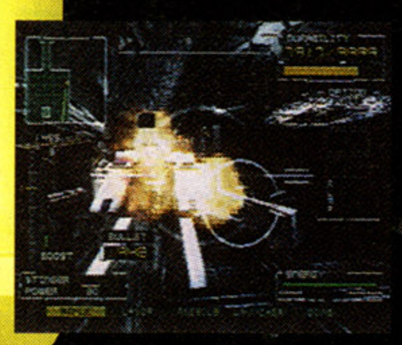
No need to reinvent the wheel. *Descent Maximum* features graphics and gameplay tweaks rather than a completely new experience

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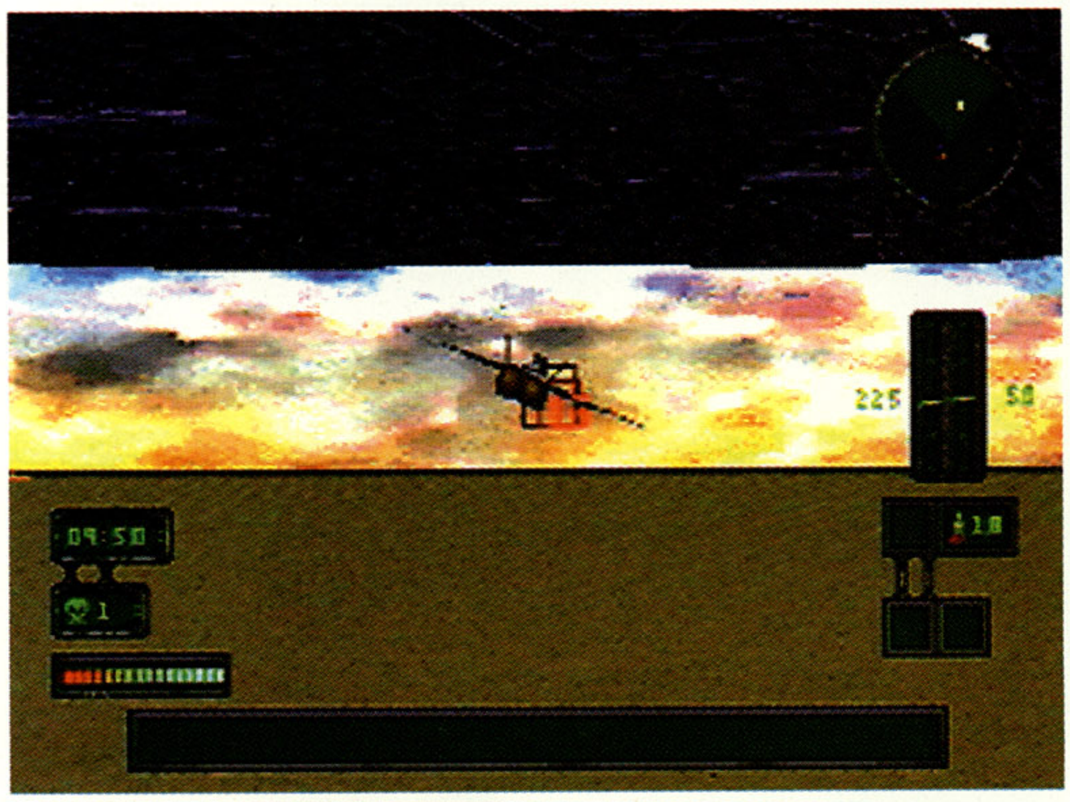
COMING SOON TO PLAYSTATION

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with less concentration and precision required for navigating, so the player's attention can now be focused more on playing the game than trying to decipher which way is up. Gameplay has been further augmented by an improved enemy AI and the addition of two "characters" from the PC *Descent II*: a Guide-bot that leads the player to mission objectives and exits and a Thief-bot that steals weapons from the player's craft.

The relative monotony of doing the same thing over and over again on very similar looking levels detracts from the experience. *Doom* and *Quake* manage to get away with this (somewhat) by communicating tension, mood, and a sense of frenetic pace. It may simply come down to the player's battling mechanical enemies, but *Descent*, like many other *Doom* clones, has never been able to match the immediacy of the original. Still, with 36 levels on six worlds and a choice of 20 different destructive weapons, fans of the *Descent* series will undoubtedly enjoy *Descent Maximum* to the, well, maximum.
Rating: ★★★

Independence Day
Publisher: Fox
Developer: Radical
Independence Day offers the player a chance to fly real fighter jets like the F-15 Eagle and prototypes like the YF-23 over cities such as Washington, New York, Paris, Moscow, Tokyo, Oahu, and Las Vegas — all the while fending off alien invaders. It's also based on the blockbuster movie *Independence Day*. Sounds like a can't-miss, right?



Flying over real cities in *Independence Day* would've been cool, but the generic cityscapes make the game lose some of its luster

PlayStation

PULSE POUNDING



Vandal Hearts
Publisher: Konami
Developer: KCET
Short on exploration, but long on turn-based combat, *Vandal Hearts* is a strategy game packed inside a role-playing storyline. In terms of quality, it rivals Konami's more traditional RPG *Suikoden*.

The plot revolves around political treachery in the country of Ishtaria. While the story brings a nice level of sophistication, it is extremely linear. *Vandal Hearts* takes the gameplay structure of Sega's *Shining Force* series and strips it of nearly every last vestige of exploration; no randomly generated battles exist, and scant village visits consist of one-stop shopping and tavern-told backstory. However, the storyline and characters are interesting, and the lack of exploration is offset by the extremely engaging combat sequences.

The player's party battles numerous foes on a polygonal 3D (and sometimes morphing) landscape. The overhead perspective, controlled via the shoulder buttons, enables players to rotate and zoom in on the grid-based battlefield. Strategic positioning and spell-casting form the crux of gameplay, and the action is kept fresh by varying battle objectives — protecting certain objects or eliminating certain key enemies, for example. The combat engine doesn't offer many shortcuts but does give the player very precise control.

***Vandal Hearts* uses the basic structure of Sega's *Shining Force* series, taking place as a series of set battles, with little exploration**

Well-balanced battles get progressively tougher as the player's characters quickly gain experience. Occasionally, a character advances two levels in the course of one skirmish. Over the course of the game, the party fluctuates between three and eight characters, and — aping *Shining Force* even more closely — when characters gain 10 levels of experience, they can advance to new classes and acquire entirely new skill sets.

Graphically, the hand-drawn, sprite-based characters are nicely animated, but become disappointingly pixelated during zoom-ins. However, the special effects shine, especially the flashy 3D spells and death animations in which enemies disappear in an eruption of arterial spray. The sound effects are equally engaging — the partially orchestral combat music doesn't change much, but it's simultaneously inspiring and unintrusive.

Vandal Hearts isn't just an engaging distraction for RPG fans waiting for *Final Fantasy VII*. Its cohesive presentation and addictive action are worth more than the sum of its parts.
Rating: ★★★★



What *Vandal Hearts* does offer, however, is a nice variety in level graphics and objectives

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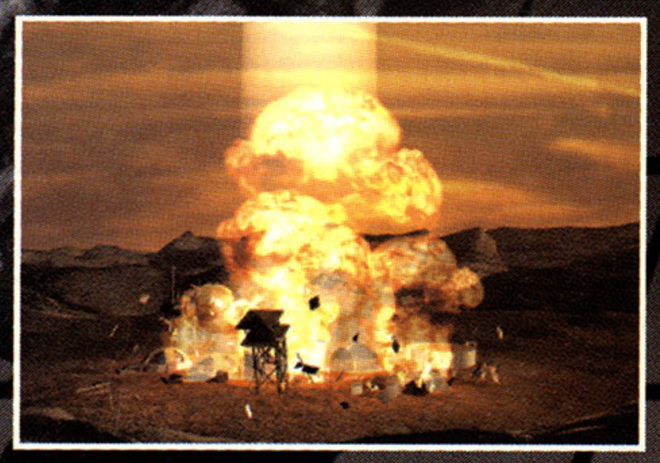
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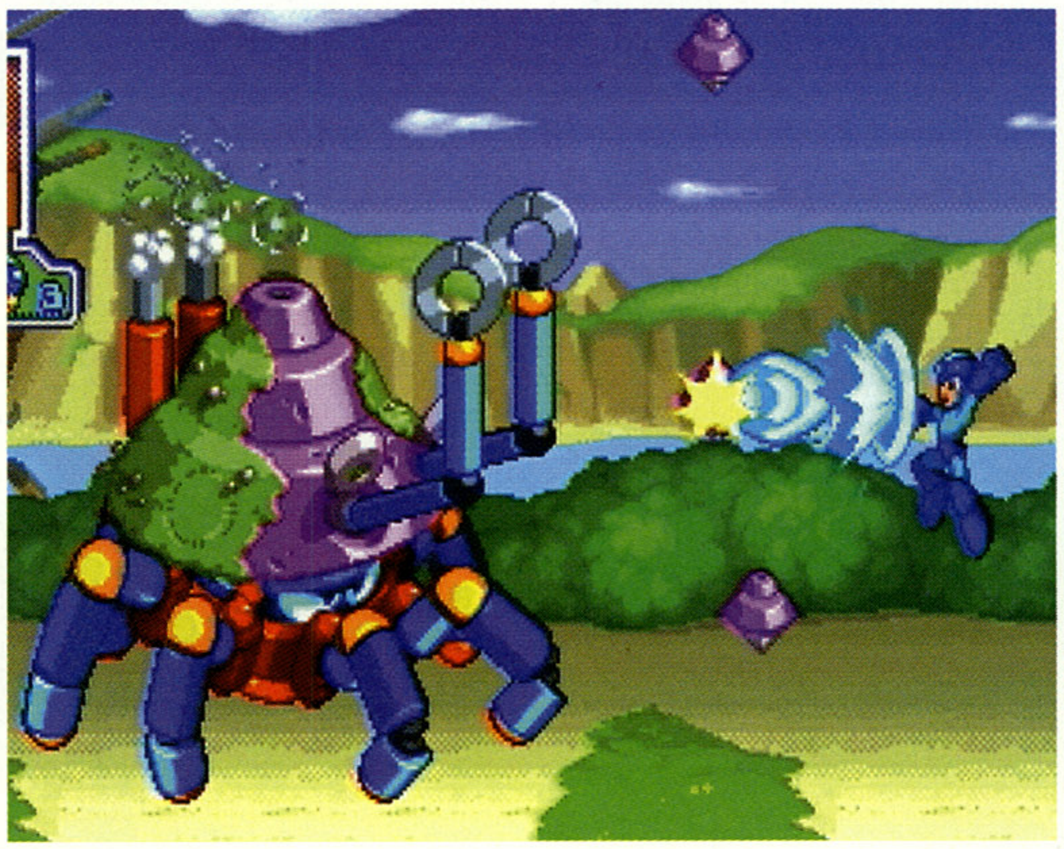
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Boy, are you wrong. The graphics are average at best, and the sloppy control makes playing the game a chore. Perhaps even worse are the poor level designs; 14 of the 15 missions have the player speeding through a generic city (besides one or two recognizable buildings in each location, the environments are very similar) underneath an alien mothership, while trying to destroy fixed targets and avoid enemy fire. The draw-in is horrendous and makes identifying targets and enemies difficult. In fact, it's so hard to see what's happening on the screen that the only thing worth watching is the radar, which is still confusing.

The only thing more tedious than the one-player game is the two-player game, in which two players (via split-screen or link cable) fly in circles until the words "target locked" appear on screen. At that point, both players press fire, and the first one to hit wins. If any of this sounds like fun or you're collecting *ID4* paraphernalia, then pick this game up. Otherwise, *Warhawk* from SingleTrac is what this game should have been.
Rating: ★★



If you've played any other *MegaMan* game, you pretty much know what to expect from *MegaMan 8* — a series that's clearly run out of steam

MegaMan 8
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
If you're a fan of the *MegaMan* series, read no further because you should know exactly what to expect from *MegaMan 8*, the latest incarnation of the inexplicably popular side-scroller series. There's really only one thing to say: here we go again. In keeping with the series' format, *MegaMan*'s new enemies are all "Something" Man — this time ClownMan, FrostMan, TenguMan, GrenadeMan, and so on.

What is inherently boring in side-scrollers — that they rely on memorization rather than strategy to get through a sequence — is doubly true of *MegaMan 8*. FrostMan's territory is a perfect example: the mine cart level gets dragged out again as MegaMan jumps on a rocket-powered sled, and in order to survive, a very particular sequence of jumping and ducking is required. No outsmarting or strategy necessary there, just memorized reflex. MegaMan's complete lack of personality (is it just us, or is MegaMan pretty damned boring?) doesn't help the title any.

MegaMan 8 does have its occasional moments. When battling TenguMan, MegaMan uses Rush (his amazingly talented flying cybernetic dog) to give him a magic carpet ride and help him pick up pals along the way. Pretty soon, you have a party with full fire power.

You could argue that the *MegaMan* series is, and always has been, aimed at younger gamers. But even the youngest gamers are out playing *Tomb Raider* these days. This series either needs serious revamping or a quiet funeral because, even as a side-scroller, *MegaMan 8* is just passable. Barely.
Rating: ★★

Rage Racer
Publisher: Namco
Developer: Namco
For fans of the *Ridge Racer* series, *Rage Racer* is a worthy addition. It features the same excellent gameplay with a noticeable improvement in graphics. Indeed, the game has moved toward a more photo-realistic look, and away from the somewhat cartoonish graphics that have been traditionally associated with the series. Control has always been a hotly debated issue for the *Ridge Racer* series, with proponents citing it as the most accurate and challenging system in the genre, while critics complain that the powerslides verge on the uncontrollable. *Rage Racer*, however, boasts a very tight feel and also features a system whereby each car can be adjusted to favor more grip or more drift, an option to increase *Rage Racer*'s appeal without alienating its traditional fans.

The Achilles' heel of the *Ridge Racer* series has been the limited number of tracks offered by the games. Once again, players can expect three excellently designed tracks, with the reward of running them in reverse if placing first on each. Still, in the era of *Formula 1* and *Andretti Racing*, this lack of tracks disappoints. Options such as logo creation and scheme painting for the cars amount to interesting window dressing but add little to the actual gaming experience. Winning races enables the player to buy new cars and performance-enhancing parts, but this perceived increase in replay value is diminished when players realize that generating more funds means taking yet another run around the same old track.

Ridge Racer games have never been deficient in gameplay or graphics, and *Rage Racer* is the best of the lot, but this third incarnation still lacks the depth and replay value that can only be satisfied by finally knuckling down and giving players more tracks.
Rating: ★★★



***Rage Racer* is unquestionably the highlight of Namco's racing series, but depth and replay value problems have yet to be addressed**

Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Okay, let's clear something up right off the bat: There is no *Super Puzzle Fighter I*. This is just a bizarre numbering innovation of which only Capcom would be capable. Capcom decided to borrow some characters from *Street Fighter II* (and *Dark Stalkers*) and to borrow its "II" status as well.

The style of gameplay is a lot like any other tile-dropping (or in this case, gem-dropping) game, but a catch makes this title ten times faster and more exciting: four or more gems amassed in a cube become power gems, which can demolish your opponent by filling up his side in one fell swoop. Unique numbered tiles count down before they can be removed — they're an uncontrollable hindrance when



***Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo* offers challenging gameplay, especially against another human**

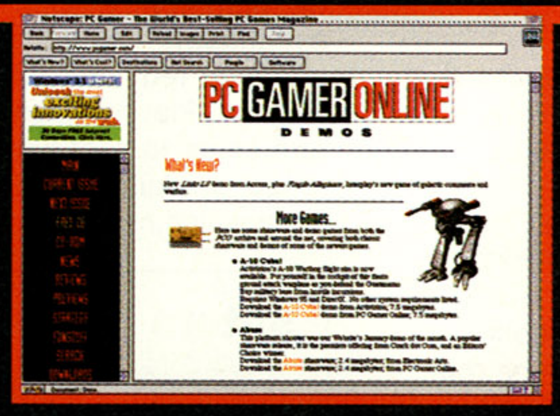
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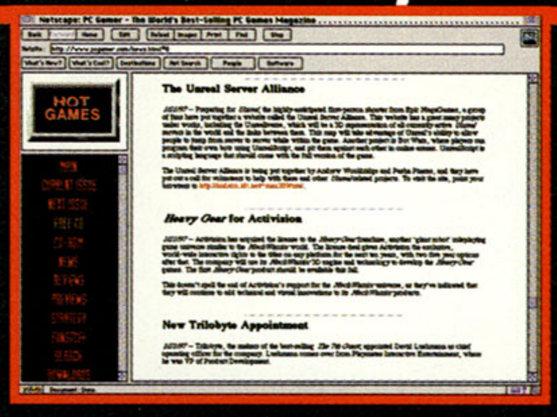
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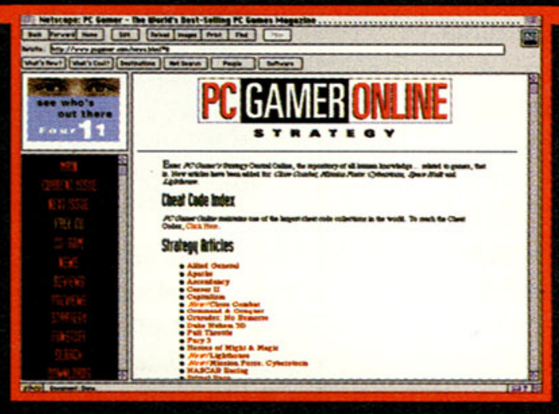
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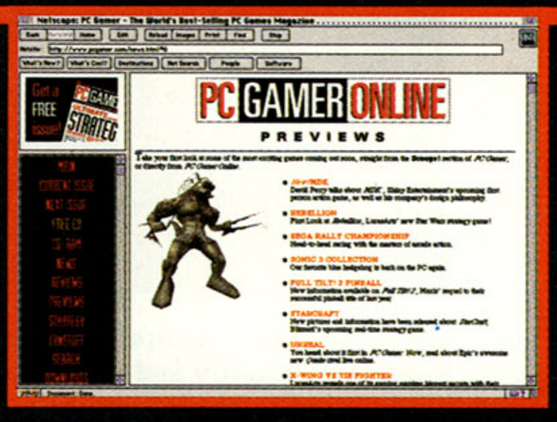
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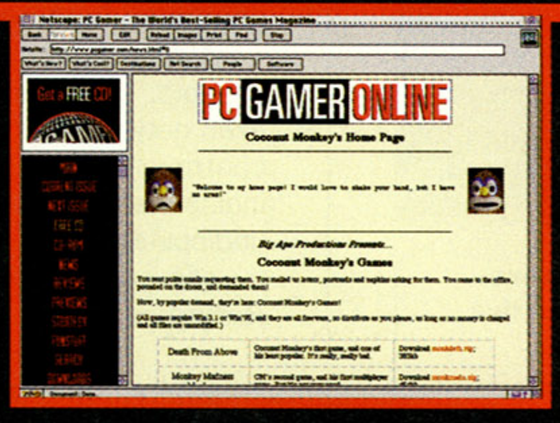
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first dropped but can be your best friend when they turn into regular gems and add to the game's depth. Like *Tetris*, *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo* is highly addictive, and a mere description of the gameplay doesn't do it justice.

On the downside, the recycled *Super Street Fighter II* characters don't serve much purpose beyond using their celebrity to sell something that has nothing to do with their original claim to fame, like Michael Jordan selling batteries. They're simply an excuse for cheap humor when they badmouth you after kicking your ass (example of the witty repartee: "I have proven the difference between us: you just suck.").

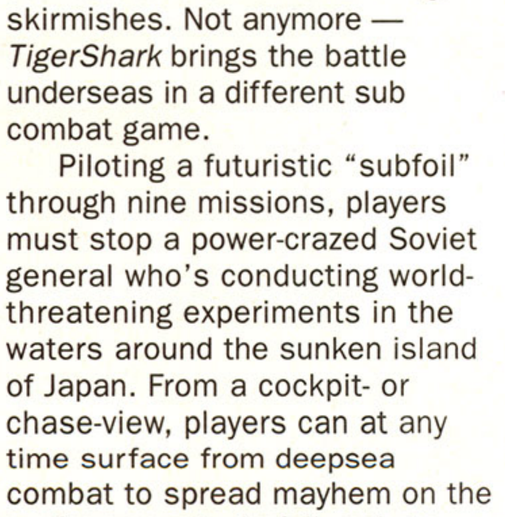
Super Puzzle Fighter II won't be remembered ten, or even five years from now, but as a kicky take on the classic game of *Tetris*, it'll do for the time being.
Rating: ★★★★

TigerShark
Publisher: GT Interactive
Developer: n-Space

Arcade shooters have been forever limited to outer space conflicts and terrain-skimming skirmishes. Not anymore — *TigerShark* brings the battle underseas in a different sub combat game.

Piloting a futuristic "subfoil" through nine missions, players must stop a power-crazed Soviet general who's conducting world-threatening experiments in the waters around the sunken island of Japan. From a cockpit- or chase-view, players can at any time surface from deepsea combat to spread mayhem on the surface as a hydrofoil, only to dive again at will. While this is the strong point of *TigerShark*'s gameplay, it's also a weakness because the undersea and surface environments are not very graphically compelling. Most the game's detail can be seen in the slick installations and the enemy boats and subs, but even they don't blow up spectacularly. What holds the game together is the tight control, clean audio, and mostly, the strategy elements required to beat each mission. Players need to "ping" with sonar to spot enemies long range, and need to (quickly) learn which missiles work most effectively with each enemy. While "pinging" reduces the fog-plane underwater, it's still a little too close for comfort on the surface.

The game's premise is promising and earns points for uniqueness, but it ultimately lacks the polish and atmospheric presence found in *Black Dawn* and *Warhawk*. Hard to get into, but then hard to put down, *TigerShark* should satisfy shooter fans who aren't afraid to read manuals, or anyone else who's happy with a game that's neither clunky nor highly innovative.
Rating: ★★★



***Tiger Shark* is certainly a sea-worthy shooter; it's innovative but not overly exciting**

Saturn

WAR GOD







Base layout and unit distribution are an integral part of *C&C*'s core strategy

Earlier missions require the player to overwhelm the enemy with swarms of infantry and grenadiers. Later missions are more involved

Command & Conquer
Publisher: Westwood
Developer: Westwood

Based on the nearly two-year-old PC release, *C&C* for Saturn marks the triumphant high point of real-time strategy genre for home consoles. Taking place in an alternate timeline, *C&C*'s storyline revolves around two world powers, the Brotherhood of NOD and the Global Defense Initiative (GDI), struggling for world dominance. The player has the option of controlling either GDI or NOD — each side having its own array of vehicles and weaponry at its disposal. Once players have chosen allegiances, they set forth on a series of missions which will eventually take them down the long road of world conquest.

Most missions require the player to build up resources by harvesting the mineral Tiberium and to fortify a base of operations, from where to launch the offensive. But some exceptions exist: some require players to disable the enemy camp and fortify the position until reinforcements arrive.

A remixed redbook soundtrack and added transparencies round out the improvements added for console. The lowered resolution hurts somewhat, but players who never played the PC version wouldn't even notice, and the interface has been neatly adapted from the original point-and-click to use the Saturn controller. *C&C* suffers tremendously from is its lack of multiplayer support — the PC version's most indispensable asset. Despite a few minor shortcomings, *C&C* manages to maintain its stature as the undisputed ruler of the real-time strategy genre and comes off as one of the best Saturn titles yet. Now, if we can just get *Red Alert* ported to consoles.
Rating: ★★★★

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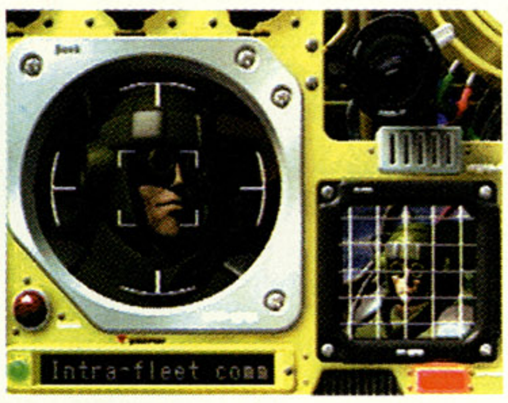
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rating saturn

Saturn

Heir of Zendor
Publisher: Koei
Developer: Koei
By now, we know what to expect from Koei: a game with a strong



This static screen is a paltry graphical treat after a hard mission in *Heir of Zendor*

story and robust strategy engine but little flair in graphics or interface. *Heir of Zendor* is yet another hallmark Koei product — a dry but engrossing strategy game.

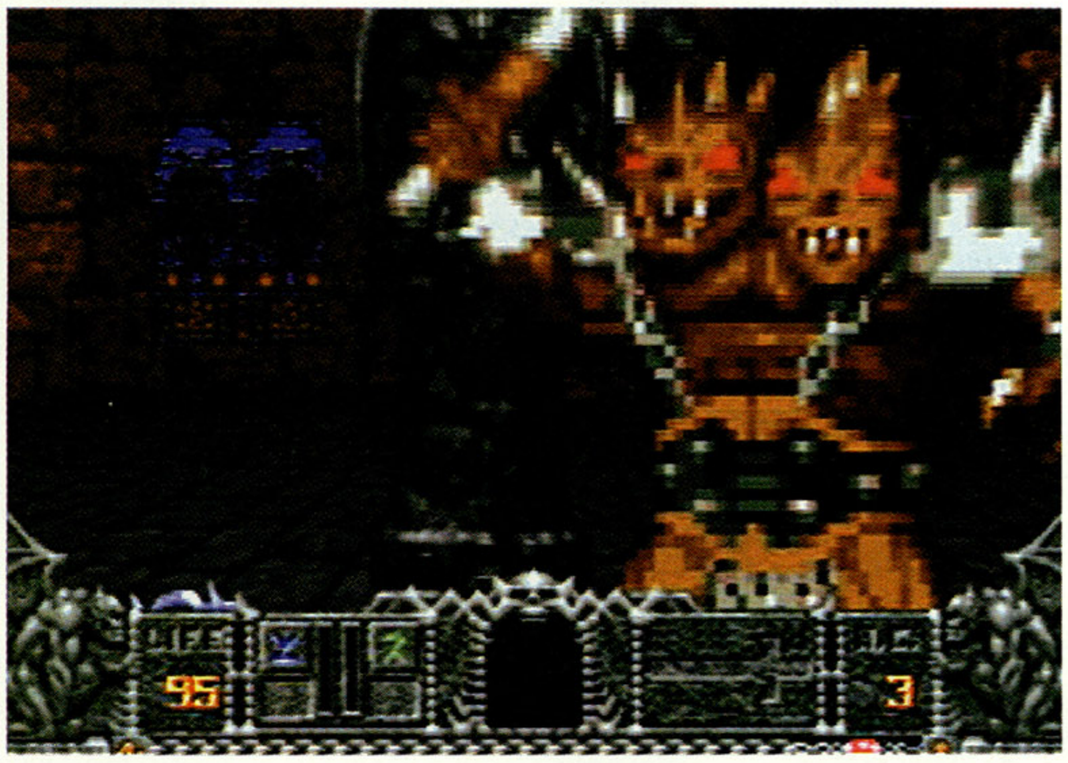
Strangely enough, this isn't an historical simulation, but one of a distant and bizarre future, in which floating continents and airships battle for control of water. The absence of a rich historical perspective for Koei to draw on makes the connection between story and game extremely weak, with only static screens punctuating the breaks between missions.

The game portion is well thought out, as usual. Firing arcs, ranged weapons, custom fleet deployment, and multiple objectives pull the player into the game. Strategy is so involved that, unless you pay close attention to the game, even the second mission becomes nearly impossible. Despite the game's primitive graphics, wargame fanatics will surely enjoy *Heir of Zendor*. However, for more casual players, *Dragon Force* from Working Designs is a better, more entertaining game.
Rating: ★★★

Hexen
Publisher: GT Interactive
Developer: Probe/Raven
Like oil and water, *Doom*-style games and console conversions don't mix well. Unless the programmers are willing to rewrite the graphics engine from scratch, PC ports suffer from getting cramped into too little memory and neglecting the console's native 3D hardware. Sadly enough, *Hexen* seems to be one such victim. Expending little effort, Probe manages to make a good game mediocre.

Hexen for Saturn is functionally identical to the original PC version. From the pixelated graphics to the level design, nothing's changed — a double-edged sword at best. On the one hand, the unique RPG environment, with its use of items and character classes, still feels fresh. On the other hand, big innovations, such as the ability to jump or look up and down, date back to the days when *Doom* was the only other game on the market.

Probe could be forgiven, had it managed to make this version exactly like the original. However, the end product has several unforgivable flaws that will frustrate players. The frame rate is fast and fluid, but only if you're moving in straight lines. The instant you rotate, gameplay becomes jerky, and overshooting the target becomes the order of the day. In addition, long save times and complicated control schemes make *Hexen*'s stay in the Saturn's CD drive a short one.



With dedicated 3D technology available, you would've figured Probe would have updated *Hexen's* graphics

Saturn owners with a PC or Macintosh should keep the game on the computer, where it belongs. If you want to play a *Doom*-style game, try *Powerslave* or *Ghen War*.
Rating: ★★



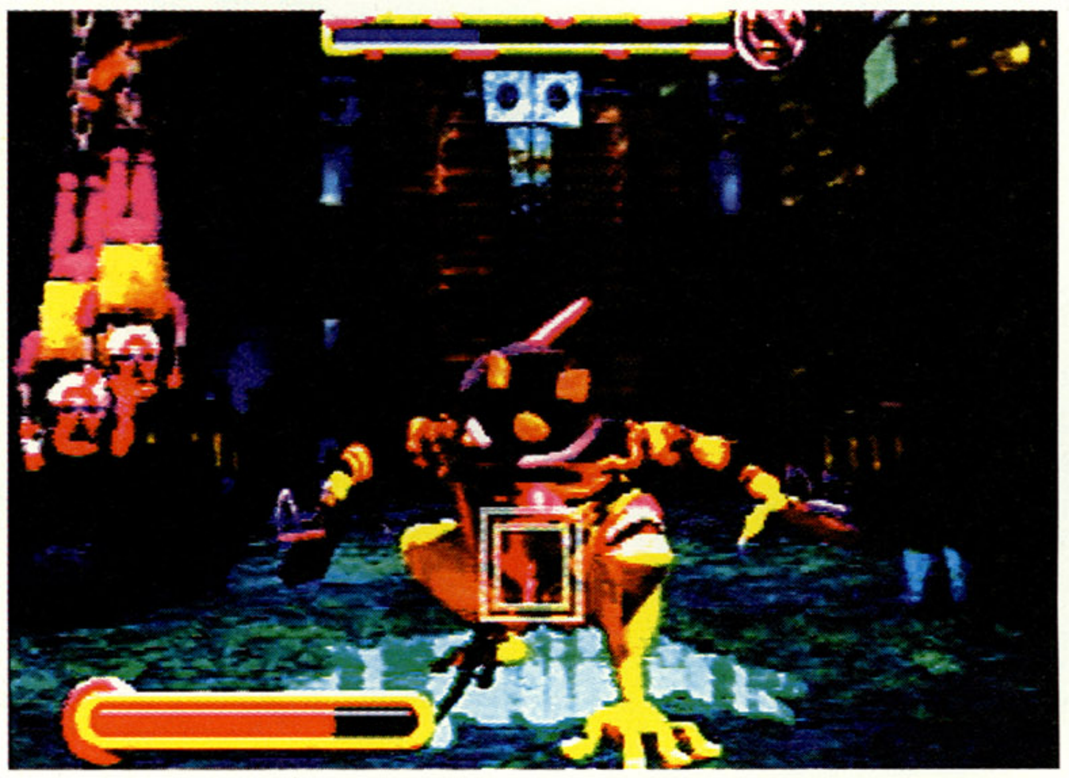
Beam's puzzle designs are consistently clever throughout *Lost Vikings II*

Lost Vikings II: Norse by Norsewest
Publisher: Interplay
Developer: Beam
Lost Vikings II debuts on the 32-bit market as a refreshing change from the current glut of 3D shooters and driving games. This puzzle game is an entertaining exercise in higher-brain logic instead of reptilian button-mashing reflexes.

The original *Lost Vikings* game's popularity lay in its novel approach to puzzles. Each character's special ability helps solve a part of the puzzle, but only a part. All three characters — Erik, Baleog, and Olaf — need to work together to get past a level. With the exception of new abilities for each Viking, gameplay in *Lost Vikings II* is the same. The levels are still nicely designed and have a reasonable learning curve.

Solving the game's later levels requires some patience on the player's part. Death comes easy for each Viking, and losing a character means failing the level. Making each character complete each level feels like working through the level three times just to continue. However, the title's gentle humor prevents it from becoming too taxing, and makes *Lost Vikings II* a pleasant game to come back to, time and time again.
Rating: ★★★

Scud
Publisher: SegaSoft
Developer SegaSoft
SegaSoft has always had innovative ideas for gameplay. From the multi-character gameplay of *Three Dirty Dwarves* to the bizarre *Mr. Bones*, its game design is anything but



Light Gun or D-pad, *Scud* looks the same in the end either way

Winston is such a girl.
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A big fat girl.



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derivative. However, SegaSoft has yet to follow up on its promise. *Scud: The Disposable Assassin*, is yet another noble failure.

Based on Rob Schrab's eponymous independent comic, players choose to play the banana-yellow *Scud*, the only publicly available robotic assassin, or Drywall, his interdimensional sidekick. Players then square off against bizarre enemies such as Jeff (a disturbing amalgam of electric parts), a squid, and a dead cat. Character and level graphics are truly original, rivaling *Earthworm Jim*'s quirky nature. Unfortunately, that's one of the few pleasures in the game.

An innovative feature of *Scud* is that it's been designed to use a light gun, a D-pad, or a combination of both. In theory, gameplay is different in each mode. Lightgun mode is an entertaining shooting gallery, with lots of fun targets and a sense of humor. Although not as interactive as Sega's own *Virtua Cop 2*, this segment is mindless fun.

Unfortunately, the other two play modes are pathetic. The D-pad's side-scrolling mode isn't even much of a platformer, much less a shooter. The gameplay has very little variety, and soon into the game, players will notice that levels look very much like the light-gun portion. Often in the game, even the D-pad mode switches to first-person perspective, so *Scud*'s biggest feature becomes moot.

If SegaSoft had decided on a good side-scroller or lightgun design, they might have had a better game on their hands. But as it is, *Scud* the game is as disposable as its hero.

Rating: ★★

PC

Death Drome

Publisher: Viacom
Developer: Zipper Interactive

In *Death Drome*, players drive around and shoot things. This is a game concept that neither developers or gamers ever seem to tire of. Here you drive around on a futuristic motorcycle, battling with seven other condemned prisoners for that elusive pardon.

Rather than the usual routine of clearing out a whole level of bad guys before you can move on, *Death Drome* has players racing against time. They secure a requisite number of kills before the clock runs out in order to

PC

IN THE BLACK



***Privateer 2: The Darkening* sports amazing explosions, futuristic music, and for those who care, a compelling plot**

Privateer 2: The Darkening

Publisher: Origin/EA
Developer: Origin

Origin is known for its *Wing Commander* space combat sims, but its latest offering, *Privateer 2: The Darkening*, has rejuvenated the genre. Players take the role of a pilot who has been found in a strangely unmarked, but battle-scarred, escape pod. Having crash-landed on a planet, players begin with no memory of who they are but quickly learn they have excellent battle skills in the cockpit. With no more knowledge than this, players are thrown into a ruthless universe of pirates and twisted plots where only the strong survive.

Many objected to the FMV plotline of the *Wing Commander* series, which *Privateer 2* emulates, but at least here players can either follow the plotline or ignore it and rely on the simple but fun combat and mission portions of the game to keep themselves occupied.

Graphically, the game is far beyond anything else seen in the genre. Ships are amazingly well light-sourced and texture-mapped, looking nearly as good as if they'd been SGI pre-rendered. The reality is that the ships are polygon constructs rendered on the fly by your PC. The frame rate for the game on all but the lowest-end systems is more than acceptable, and the flight mechanics of the game are excellent. The interface is easy to learn, and full support of most flight sticks and throttles is provided.

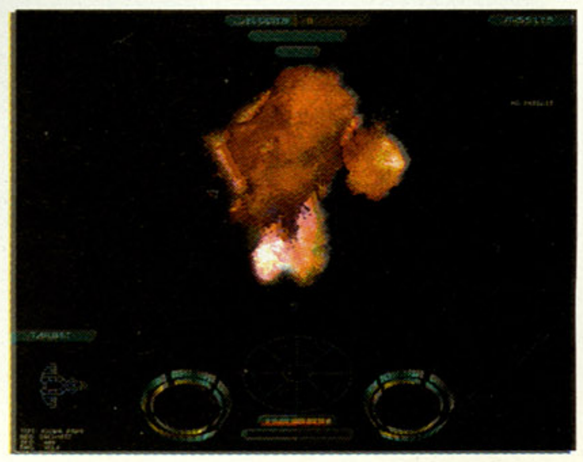
Echoing the classic structure of Firebird's *Elite*, the biggest attraction of the game is it gives you the ability to take on jobs, make money, then upgrade your ship. Dozens of different missiles, shield rechargers, auto-repair droids, space mines, and other gadgets make your ship more formidable. Each ship type has its own characteristics for armor, laser mounts, speed, special item mounts, missile mounts, shield levels, and more. Logically, the better the ship, the more it costs.

Players can hire cargo ships and purchase materials to trade on different planets and stations. In addition to trade, you can accept missions on the intergalactic bulletin board, including everything from escorting a cargo ship or destroying a target vessel to recovering some item or tracking down a particular person. In addition, players can hire wingmen of varying abilities to help them on whatever endeavor they are currently trying.

Privateer 2 does suffer from a few technical glitches, features extremely poor documentation, and lacks multiplayer options and Windows 95 support. However, these minor distractions are the only downside to an otherwise absolutely flawless game.

Rating: ★★★★





The heart and soul of the game is an addictive combat engine and clean flight model. The ability to customize your ship and choose from a large and varied set of missions (which you're only in for the money) adds a lot

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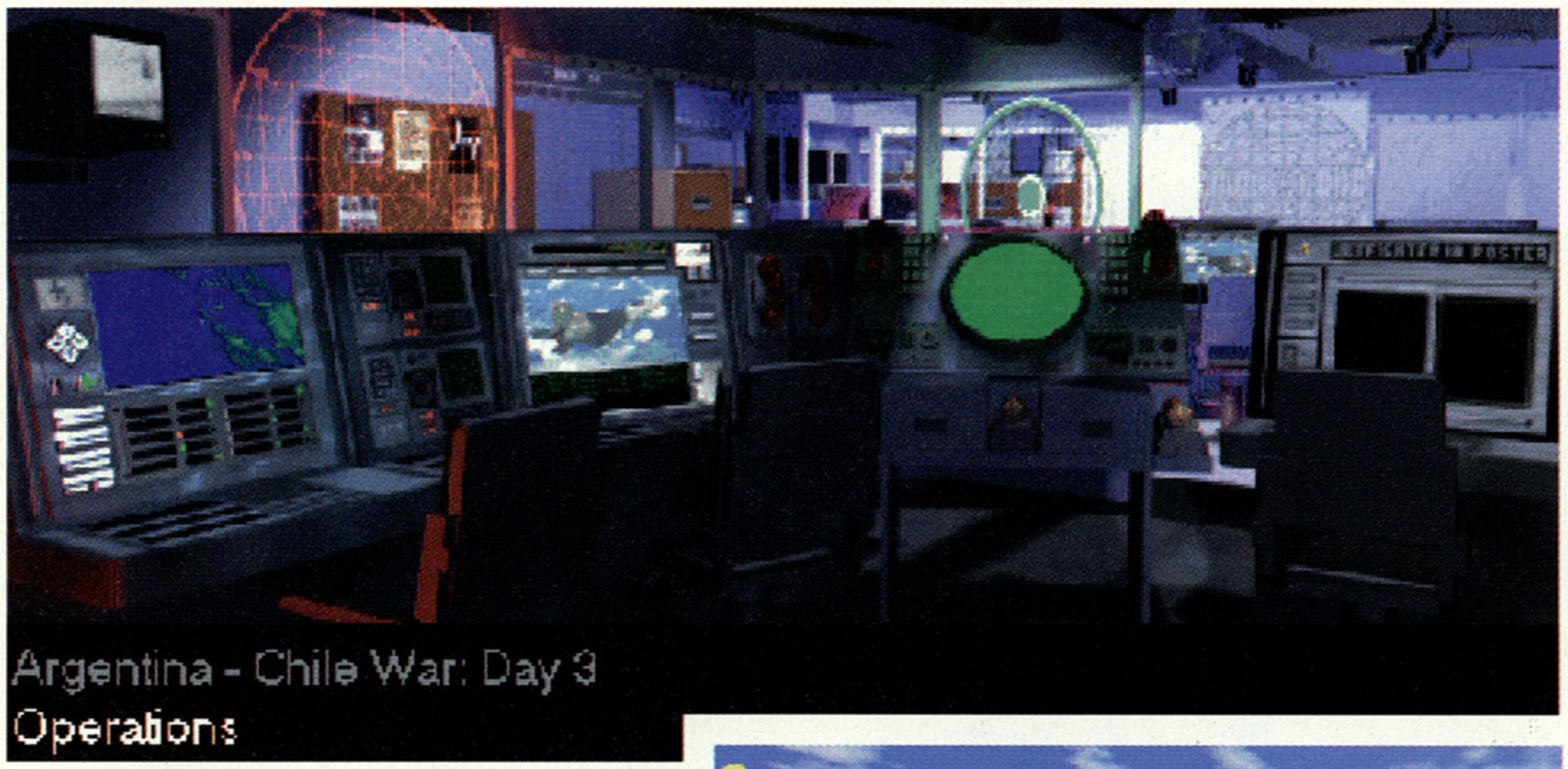
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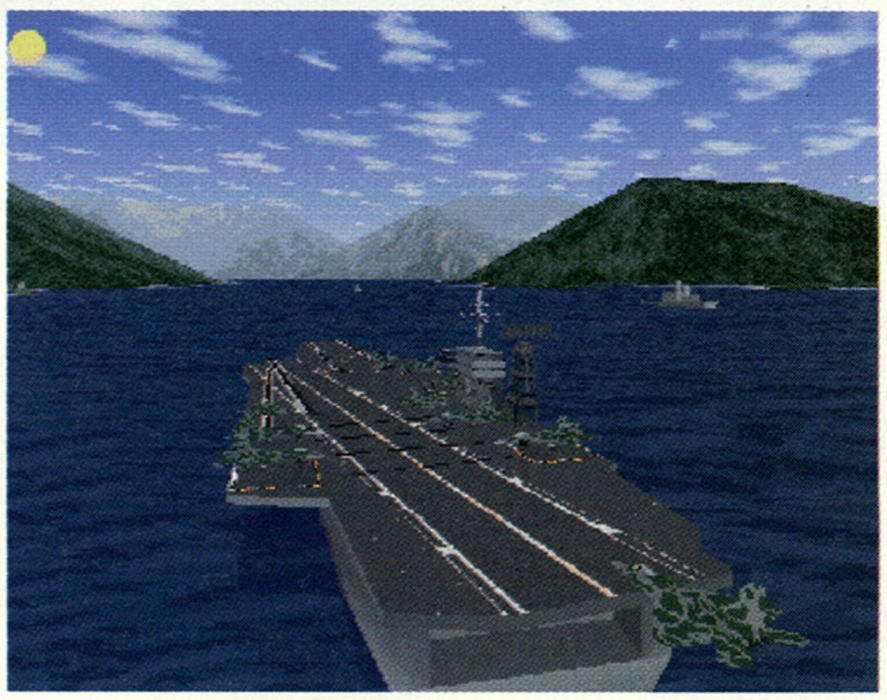
FLYING HIGH AGAIN

Jetfighter III

Publisher: Interplay
Developer: Mission Studios

After nearly four years in development, the third installment of the Mission Studios *Jetfighter* series has finally soared and puts you in the cockpit of the deadly F-22N — a fictional naval variant of the fabled F-22 fighter. With a plot ripped straight from yesterday's headlines (and no doubt conceived in the early stages of development), you're a rookie pilot assigned to a U.N. battle group. You are deployed off the Colombian coast and forced to battle drug lords who've secured the backing of the Cuban military in an attempt to tighten their grip on America's deadliest vice.

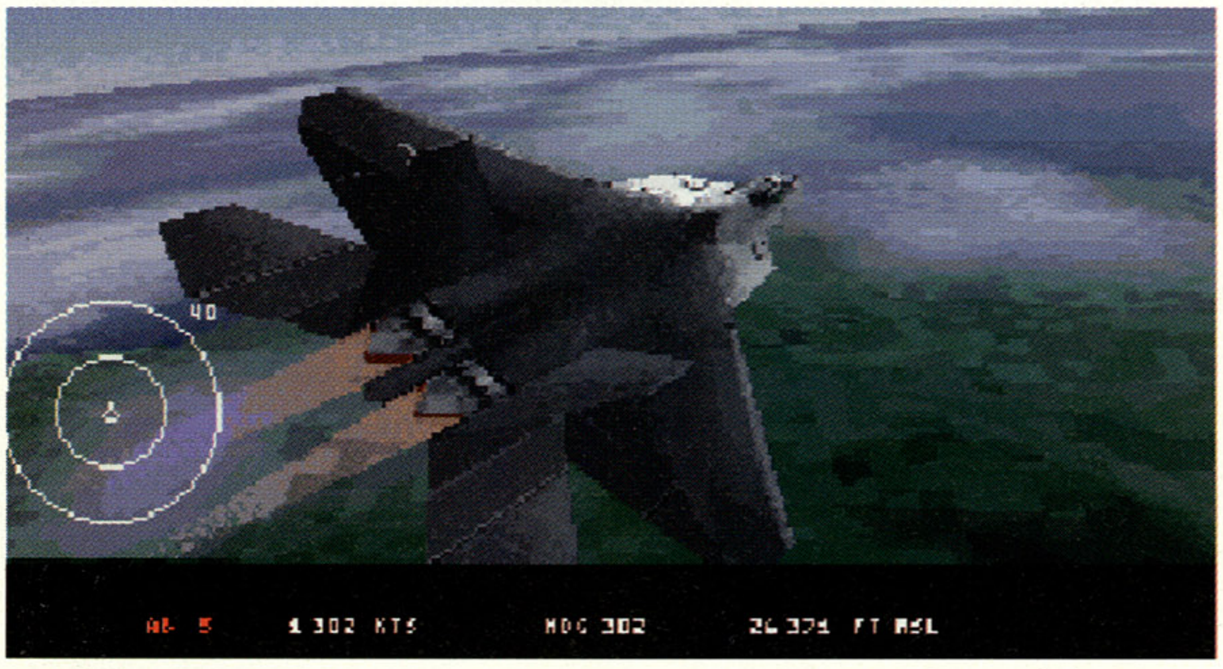




The adventure game element places you on the carrier U.N.S. Peacekeeper where you'll receive briefings and roam the ship's interior (above). Thanks to a naval scenario, you'll get to try your hand at tricky carrier landings after each mission (right)

It's part adventure and part flight sim, in which you'll have the freedom to roam about the aircraft carrier U.N.S. Peacekeeper. You'll attend mission briefings, check e-mail from home, and bone up on your military trivia in the ship's library. Once in the air, fans of previous *Jetfighter* games will find all the familiar trademarks of the series here, with a sleek control interface, eye-popping graphics, and an abundance of bogey-blasting fun. But more importantly in this age of increasing realism, *Jetfighter III* manages to hold its own with the big boys of the genre (*EF2000* and *Falcon 3.0*), by giving equal time to the realistic features so many sim fans crave while maintaining the simplified features that enable novices to feel like they've earned their wings.

Numerous customizable options fine-tune the flight model and difficulty to your specific tastes, and each mission can be flown in its entirety (from catapult launch to landing) or only until all objectives have been met. The flight model is believable and convincing, if not entirely accurate, and only the most jaded flight sim junkie will find fault with the occasional ripple in the realism. Visually, *Jetfighter III* goes for broke — it uses over 3.5 million square miles of terrain data and high-resolution texture maps and achieves the same graphic heights as *EF2000*, with some of the most striking graphics in a modern flight sim. The lush green valleys and snowy capped mountains are just some of the visual treats you'll find as you fly high above the Andes mountains blasting Mig 29s, evading SAM sites, and attacking ground structures throughout several campaigns.



Boasting a graphics engine that rivals top sims like *EF2000* and *Longbow*, *Jetfighter III's* visual prowess is first rate

While *Jetfighter III*'s grasp on reality can wane during the battles even on the highest possible settings (that is, SAM sites and AA guns will fire while enemy planes are in the air), the missions are well conceived and varied, presenting you with incremental challenges that keep you on your toes.

Sadly, no multiplayer options are available to round out the experience with online competition, but Mission Studios does promise something along those lines will be available shortly to give the game a much-needed afterlife.

Jetfighter III manages to soar high when others flop. If you're in the market for a thrilling (but not necessarily realistic) representation of modern air combat, *Jetfighter III* is a perfect choice. Only a lack of multiplayer support and mild problems with the game's realism keep this from five-star territory.

Rating: ★★★★

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advance to the next stage. This can lead to some truly hairbreadth escapes, as you desperately work to find one more enemy to kill as the last few seconds tick away.

The fast-paced game maintains a decent frame rate throughout, which adds a good deal to its appeal. This is achieved partly through design trickery — instead of rendering each level's entire *DeathDrome* all at once, each level is broken into four smaller arenas linked by tunnels, which require less CPU processing.

The weapons are also fun; one even lets players lay down a light wall similar to the Light Cycles in *Tron*. But the game lacks any difficulty settings; it can be beaten all the way through in several sittings by following some simple patterns.

While *DeathDrome* has some interesting elements, it's hardly groundbreaking enough to be remembered a year from now. But it's still a good first offering from Zipper Interactive, a development company with its roots in networked military simulations.

Rating: ★★★

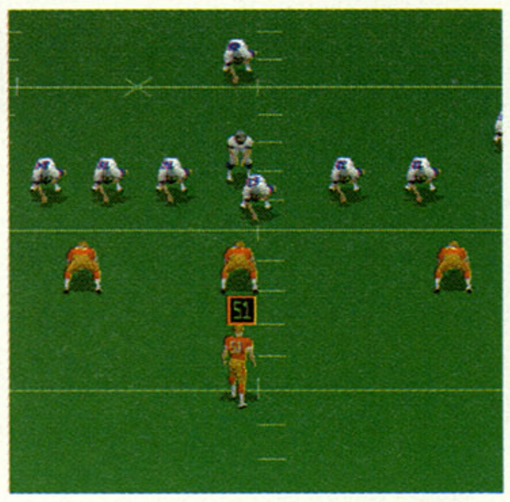
Front Page Sports: Football Pro '97

Publisher: Sierra
Developer: Dynamix

Last year's most critically acclaimed PC football series makes the transition to Windows 95, but the conversion is rocky. Like *Front Page Sports: Baseball*, *Football Pro '97* is hampered by numerous bugs and a poor arcade mode, which seriously offset the detailed statistics and superb simulation mode that are the game's traditional strong points.

By default, the game runs in a window with all the Win 95 desktop clutter around it, yielding a very unappealing game environment. Player control is mushy to say the least, as the ballcarriers tend to get tangled up in the backfield, while selecting plays on the playcalling screen with a mouse is inexplicably difficult. These glaring problems in the game's buggy interface are doubly frustrating to those of us who remember how well the DOS versions seemed to work.

Granted, some new graphic elements, such as camera angles, are added, and uniforms show the players' real numbers (a nice touch). But by and large, this is three or four year old DOS code clumsily retrofitted into a Windows 95 product.



***Football Pro '97* has a few good points, but can't compete**

And the game's strengths stem from its older DOS versions; these keep long-time fans still interested in this series. *Football Pro '97* is second-to-none in hardcore football simulation. No other game on the market has the number of custom options that *Football Pro* does, from career leagues and custom team creation to the play designer and the huge number of generated player stats.

But if you already own last year's version there's little reason to upgrade. And for those who are looking merely for quick, arcade-style gaming, there are several other, far more playable titles, such as *Madden NFL '97* or *The Quarterback Club*.

Rating: ★★

Arcade

Arcade

LOW RIDER

Cruis'n World

Publisher: Midway/Nintendo
Developer: Midway

Cruis'n World, the new sequel to Midway's *Cruis'n USA*, didn't come as a surprise to anyone. Long-time developer Eugene Jarvis's commercially successful driving title originally arrived near the release of *Daytona USA* and didn't get as much hype, but people loved it. And if you look around any bar, arcade, or pizza house anywhere in the U.S., you'll see *Cruis'n*.

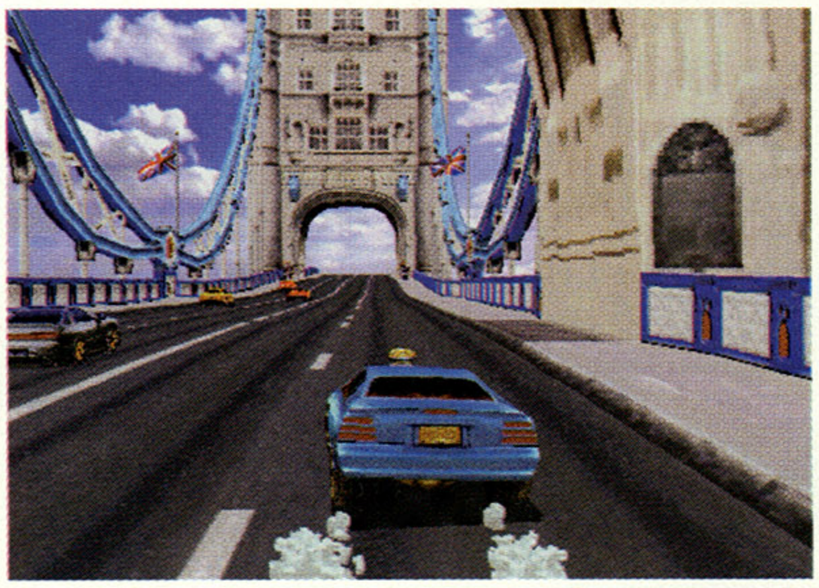
The best part of *Cruis'n* is its perfect sense of arcade driving. You can sit down, drive fast, knock cars off the road, kill animals (in a funny, road-kill kinda way), and get into chaotic multi-car collisions — all without knowing too much about videogames, or, for that matter, driving. *Cruis'n World* exploits its predecessor's formula to the tee, bringing all of the gameplay, hilarity, and set of problems back in full form, this time taking gamers across the world.



Egypt, Paris, France, Italy, China, Moscow, Mexico, Australia, New York — you name it, you can drive there. The gameplay is the same as before, but has been fine tuned, and it makes a difference. The control seems a little more responsive, and there are different cars (pressing the view buttons reveals at least three different vehicles), including a Hummer with mounted machine gun. The roads feature more undulating dips, jumps, surprising turns, and environments such as massive staircases, roadblocks, divided tunnels, fire-breathing temple walls — all contributing to a course design that generally takes more skill on which to drive.

The original problems are still there. Although the environments are highly detailed and rich, background pop-in is just as blatant and painful as ever. Catching up after a bad multi-car collision is rare. In any view but the first-person perspective, the sense of speed is only moderate — no better than before. And despite the slightly improved driving mechanics, the difference between driving the Hummer and almost any other car (with the exception of the Porche) isn't terribly noticeable. With a game that is as highly stylized as this, its strengths become its weaknesses — anyone can sit down and play it well the first time, but, in turn, the learning curve isn't very steep, and even a minimal skillset isn't needed to become a pro.

Rating: ★★★



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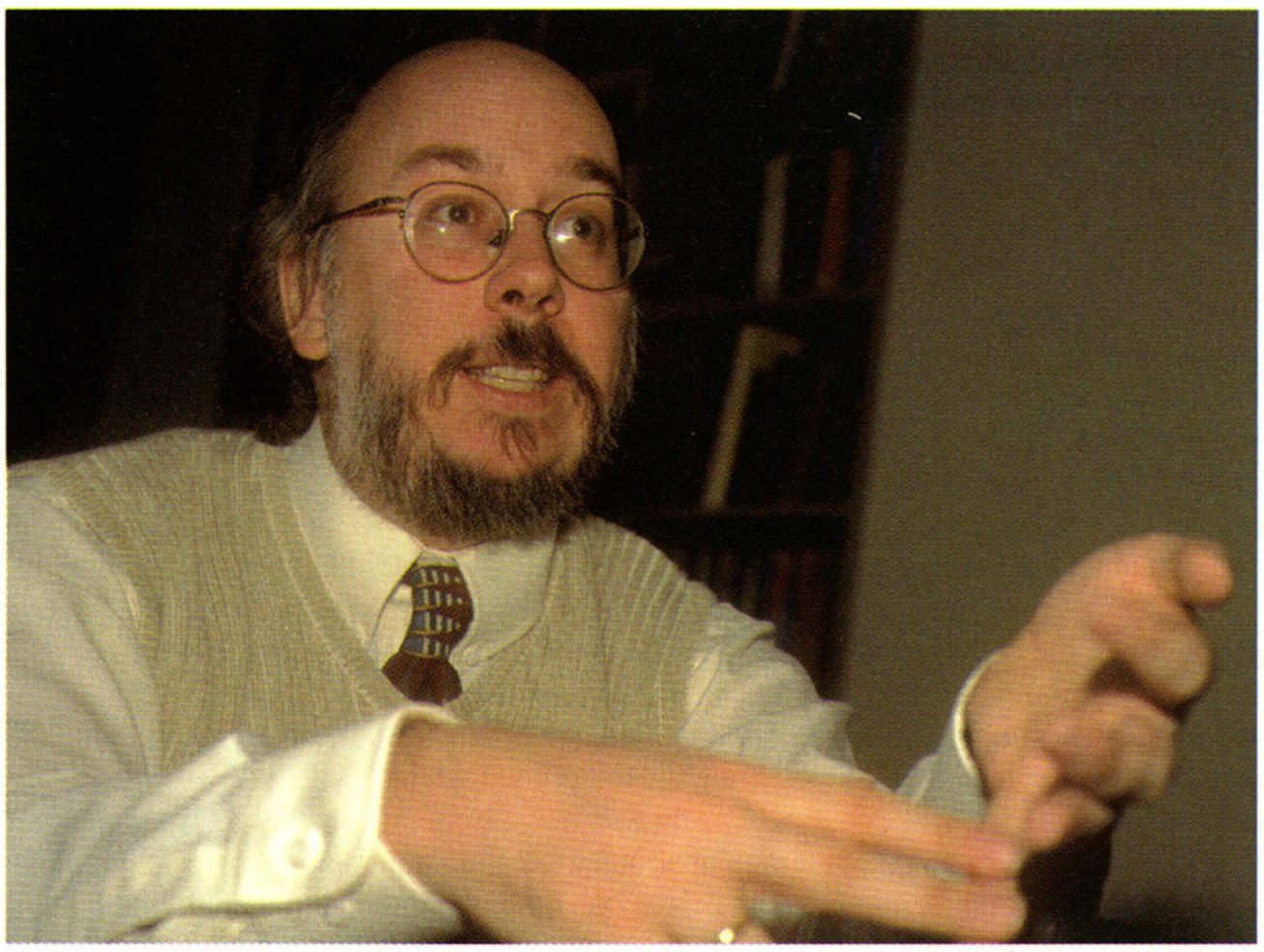
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(continued from **page 13**)

the world is big and scary and kids are beaten down all the time.

NG: But surely a kid finding self-esteem by retreating into a videogame instead of dealing with the issues that affect his or her real life has to be a bad thing?

Prof. Jenkins: I don't think that playing a videogame is fully a retreat from the real world. It's a shifting to a different level; it's another way of engaging the world. And I think that if your son is being beaten up and his self-esteem is being stripped away from him by things that are happening in the school or on the playground, then I'd be glad to see his self-esteem restored and built up by playing a game that gives him a sense of power.

NG: The last and perhaps most worrying obvious difference between violent situations in videogames and violent situations in real life is that in games, violence is the only option. If you're confronted by a bully on a playground you can run away, you can wisecrack your way out of trouble, you can call for help, you can threaten to tell the bully's teacher or parents, and you can — ideally, perhaps — become friends. There are many alternatives to fighting, and a kid's handling of these situations will teach him valuable lessons.

In a videogame, however, violence is usually the only choice.

Prof. Jenkins: I don't think any kid who decided to go out in the world and behave like he did in a videogame would last very long. The kids who are drawn to the most violent games are often the kids who are the most picked on in the school, but they know that if they went up to the bully and tried to flatten him the odds are the bully would flatten them back. They would learn really quick that the videogame solution isn't viable in the real world.

But certainly, that violence is the only option is one of the things that really does bother me about these games. And please realize, I'm not here to give videogames a completely clean bill of health. I do think that there are some real questions about the nature of narratives, or game scenarios, we're being given by game makers.

Often the videogame adaptation of existing narratives reduces them and flattens what's interesting about their stories. Sure, we can say that technology doesn't support the incorporation of social interaction or character development very well, but we might also say that the priorities of game and technology designers have been shaped by an assumption that action is the primary motivating force.

Real life "Street Fighters"?

NG: So what would you say to a mother who is worried that when her son plays videogames he seems to become more aggressive and violent?

Prof. Jenkins: First, I think I would say that this phenomenon is going to be a complex one. It may well be that the game brings out something aggressive in the child. But it may just as readily be that the game becomes the outlet for his aggressive feelings. I've seen my own son come home after a hard day at school, completely frustrated, stomp open the front door, slam his books down, race to the Nintendo or the Sega system, and play aggressively for an hour, and then come back sweet as peaches.

"There's no [proof] that there is a relationship between watching violent content and increased likelihood to be violent in real life"

NG: Surely, then, this is the fundamental question: do violent videogames provide a safe outlet for natural aggression, or do they feed, encourage, and in some ways legitimize a hunger for violence?

Prof. Jenkins: I think it could do both. I don't think it's a simple phenomenon. When we engage with technologies it's partially our lives and our culture that determine what the effect of these technologies are going to be. Sure, there could be some situations where playing a videogame causes an aggressive effect, but I think to generalize from that to the entire society and assume that this is true in every case — I think it's problematic.

NG: Presumably this whole debate has happened before with other new forms of entertainment for children, and will happen again?

Prof. Jenkins: It's an ageless debate. If you look at the history of popular culture from the turn of the

Want to know more?

This is a subject matter that we're sure all NG's readers will have an interest in — and it's part of a debate that's not going to go away. While Professor Jenkins manages to poke holes in much of Senator Lieberman's case against violent videogames, he acknowledges that he's unable to "give them a completely clean bill of health." Indeed, there are many unanswered questions in the field of media studies, and precious little research into the effects of videogames specifically.

For Next Generation readers interested in further exploring this subject matter, however, Professor Jenkins suggests the following reading materials:

- **E. Anthony Rotundo, "Boy Culture," in *American Manhood: Transformation of Masculinity From the Revoltion to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic, '93).**
- **Marsha Kinder, *Playing with Power in Movies, Television and Video Games* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, '91).**
- **Ellen Seiter, *Sold Separately: Parents and Children in Consumer Society* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, '93).**
- **Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Knopf, '76).**
- **Mark West, *Children, Culture and Controversy* (Hamden, CT: Archon, '88).**
- **Patricia M. Greenfield and Rodney R. Cocking (Eds.) Interacting with Video (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, '96)**
- **Sherry Turkle, *Life on Screen: Identity in the Age of Internet* (New York: Simon and Schuster, '95).**
- **Steve Jones (Ed.) *Cybersociety* (New York: Sage, '94).**

century forward — from the start of the age of mass amusement and mass production of culture — every form of new popular culture has undergone these debates in one form or the other.

The introduction of the comic strip in newspapers, for example, was attacked mercilessly by Senators and reformers. There were hundreds of articles published in national newspapers and magazines concerning the inappropriateness of mixing humor and fact, the ridicule of adult authorities, and the breaking down of law and order, respect, and dignity. According to these people, newspaper comic strips were going to turn children into total hooligans. And those same arguments are cropping up now.

NG: So why does this pattern of parents reacting against new forms of media keep repeating itself?

Prof. Jenkins: Partially it's a reaction by parents against something that wasn't part of their own childhood. It's a fear of technology — a technophobia of a very deep kind.

Basically, parents want to be able to totally control the social, cultural, and psychological development of their child, but they can't. No parent has ever fully controlled their child — and it wouldn't be healthy if they had. When something alien or unfamiliar creeps into a child's life, the parent looks around to try to find something to explain it. The last thing they look toward is the idea that their child might be developing autonomy and a sense of his or her own identity. Yet this is probably the first place they ought to be looking.

NG: And parents will always go through a period of being scared of what their children do?

Prof. Jenkins: There's never been a point in popular culture where some people weren't saying that this is the worst time in the history of childhood, or that children are being corrupted and that we'll never be able to survive as a civilization if we keep feeding them radio programs, serial novels, or comic strips. It just so happens that the medium of the moment is videogames.

Senator Lieberman's "evidence"

NG: So you would challenge Senator Lieberman's "evidence" against violent videogames?

Prof. Jenkins: All we're given is a combination of anecdotal evidence of limited situations which we don't adequately understand — they're not described in sufficient cultural or psychological detail for us to really know what happened — or empirical research results that tell us very well how children watch television or play games in a laboratory. They don't, however, tell us very much about how children watch TV or play games in their own home. They assume that children will behave the same in all social situations, and clearly this is not true.

And even these empirical studies disagree amongst themselves. There's been no uniform agreement that there is a relationship between watching violent content and increased likelihood to be violent in real life. That's not to say that we shouldn't be concerned or that there couldn't be a problem with individual kids, but the study results that we have are not a ground for national policy. Nor are they a ground for the kind of sweeping generalizations that Lieberman and other people want to rely on when they frame their critiques of violence in the media.

NG: So would you argue that a society in which all violence was expelled from all children's media might actually be harmful, because it would shut off avenues for kids to naturally explore their feelings?

Prof. Jenkins: First of all, I don't think it would be practical. It doesn't take a lot for children to be interested in violence. I'll give you an example. When I was in elementary school, we went to a museum devoted to the battle of Atlanta. We came home and decided which kids were born in the North and which kids were born in the South, and we began duking it out in the playground. This was a educational, historical field trip, to a good museum, but it didn't take a lot to get us started.

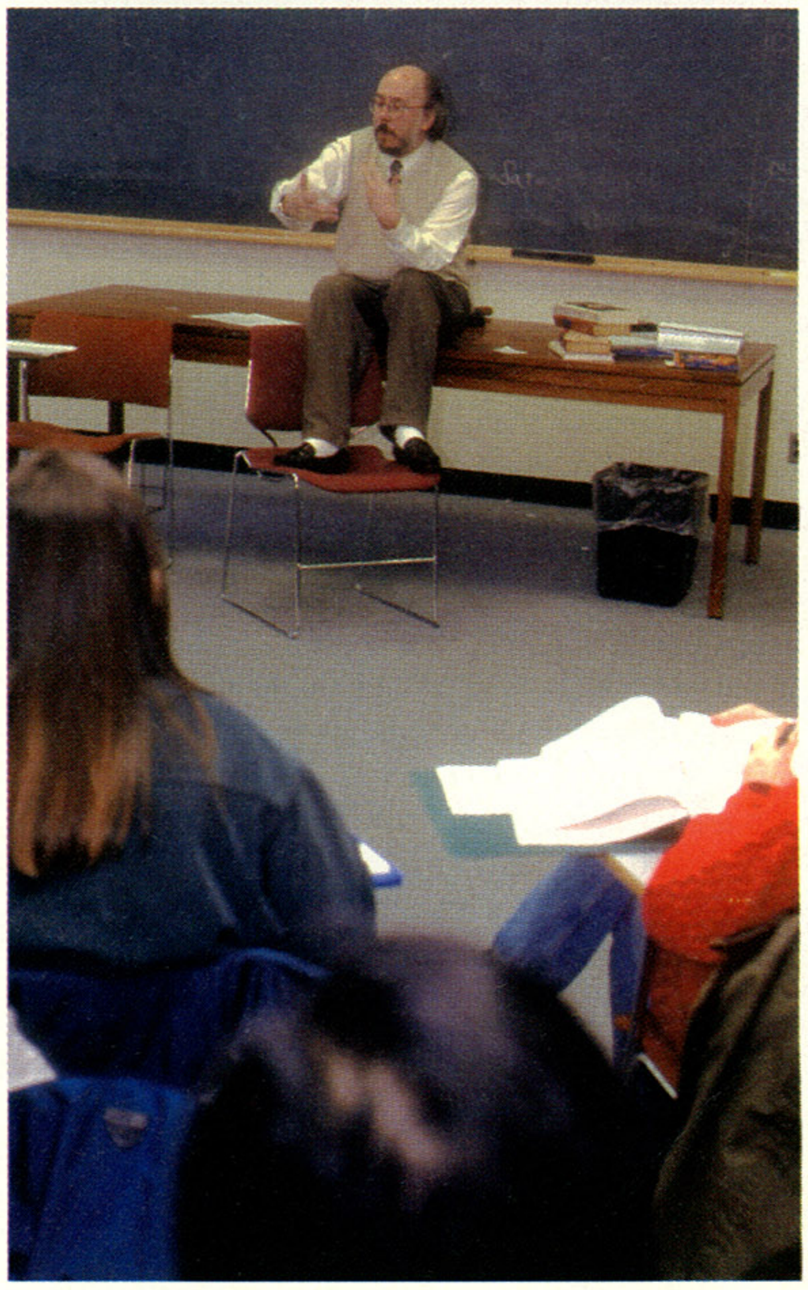
NG: And would a society in which all media violence was banished be desirable?

Prof. Jenkins: I'm not convinced it would. I think it would be dehumanizing. I think it would destroy something vital in human beings — our ability to act decisively and think autonomously. Children would be passive consumers of a banal culture of sweetness and light — which no one really wants to live in. And to inflict that on our children, I think, would be the worst form of child abuse.

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Want to respond?

Last month's interview with Senator Lieberman resulted in a flood of feedback. This month, contact us at ngonline@imagine-inc.com, or Professor Jenkins directly at henry3@mit.edu



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Throughout history, famous letters have made a difference. Well, we're pretty sure they have, anyway. So go ahead, let the gaming world know what *you* think. Write us at **Next Generation** Letters, 150 North Hill Drive, Brisbane, CA 94005. Fax us: (415) 468-4686. E-mail us: ngonline@imagine-inc.com.



Read 'em and weep

It was disheartening for me to read the "Coming Soon" section of "The Top 10 Online Gaming Sites" in **NG 27**, which included Engage games online, as the article contained some misinformation regarding the unique games network and online community we're building for PC gamers everywhere.

Although Engage was spun out of Interplay a year ago, it is a completely separate company with other investors and is *not* "Interplay's online game service." While Engage carries some of Interplay's games, we also offer games from many other developers and publishers. Our strategy has always been to feature content from the very best developers and publishers. Engage features games from Interworld Productions, Blizzard Entertainment, Digital Alchemy, Sourceror, Celeris, and many others. Additionally, we have not announced that we'll carry Bomberman on our service.

Our goal is to provide PC gamers with an online games community containing many of the world's best-selling titles plus new games that are exclusive to online and often exclusive to Engage. We're also making Engage easy to reach by providing access from both the Internet and major commercial online services. We currently have distribution agreements in place with America Online, Prodigy, CompuServe, Earthlink, Concentric, and the Jones Internet Channel. Additional providers will be announced in the near future.

Also, please note that our correct URL is http://www.engagegames.com.

Jeff Leibowitz
President
Engage Games Online

We apologize for any confusion caused. Thanks for setting the record straight.

I am writing to you in regard to the article in your March issue, "Top 10 Online Gaming Sites." On page 38, you quote a "Papyrus spokesperson" who makes extremely derogatory statements



***NASCAR* might run just fine on Ten; please keep an open mind**

regarding Total Entertainment Network's ability to run our *NASCAR Racing 2* game.

As the person responsible for that project at Papyrus, I want to set the record straight.

I take serious issue with the statement made by this unnamed Papyrus employee, and **Next Gen**'s assertion that this is somehow "marketing hype." Papyrus has been developing a low latency version of our *NASCAR Racing* title for over two years. We currently have a prototype running publicly which has logged over 10 million user-minutes to date. We are very versed in what it takes to design, build, and operate a low latency data/game network.

Throughout our project, we have stayed in close contact with Ten. In fact, our relationship with Ten predates the merger of Planet Optigon and Outland — the product of which became Total Entertainment Network. We have done exhaustive research into the capabilities of all of the low latency game networks out there, and not only are we convinced that Ten can satisfy the requirements of *NASCAR*, we are convinced that Ten can do it better than anyone else.

We have found Ten's technology to be the most advanced, consistent, and efficient available. Before even seriously considering an agreement with Ten, we spent months working with its technical people to gain a thorough understanding of its infrastructure, and even more time pounding on every piece of that infrastructure to see how it performed under all conditions. We believe in it, because we have already proven that it works.

As an official spokesperson for Papyrus, I am very upset that an erroneous and inflammatory statement by an unknown Papyrus spokesperson could in any way give the impression that we do not believe in Ten's ability to deliver a quality product. We are very enthusiastic about our relationship with Ten, and we are thoroughly convinced of Ten's ability to deliver the finest low latency game network available.

I ask that you make efforts to clarify Papyrus's feelings about Ten, and I further ask that in the future, you gather information from official spokespeople at Papyrus/Sierra On-Line.

Ed Martin Manager & Series Director, *NASCAR Racing* Online Series Papyrus / Sierra On-Line, Inc.

Printing quotes from unattributed sources is always a risky business, and yet it's often the only way for a magazine to get to the meat of a story. If a game magazine based its stories purely on conversations with public relations specialists and official company press releases, then there would be no bad games, every hardware company would be "number one" and, yes, the world would probably be flat. The problem is, of course, that sometimes the people we speak to don't want their name attributed to a story or a quote (usually because they know that their comments could "get them into trouble" with their employer). And this usually means that when the story gets printed, the employer in question feels cheated and — understandably — suspicious of a quote to which the magazine attributes no name.

But every magazine's first responsibility is to its readers, and this means getting the story right. And every reporter knows never to reveal sources that have asked to remain confidential — otherwise who would ever speak to them off the record again? So every now and then, an unattributed quote gets printed.

In this instance, a reporter spoke to someone directly involved with the *NASCAR 2*

project who says one thing, while Sierra, Papyrus, and Ten say another. We concede that it was wrong to refer to this source as a "spokesperson" for Papyrus — speaking to the press isn't this person's official function — but his or her comments were based on first-hand knowledge and were on the record.

At this stage, **Next Generation** urges its readers to keep an open mind until they get a chance to play the game on Ten for themselves.

I was astounded, no amazed, no baffled by something in your February issue. Your preview of *British Open Golf* says that Rex Bradford developed the first PC golf sim. Did you do your homework? Tsk tsk. If you had, you would have known that *Leaderboard* (with the first swing meter) was released for Commodore 64/128 on Feb 1, 1986 — months before Rex had ever even seen a golf sim game!

If he claims Access copied his design, maybe he'd better have a talk with (as you put it) "the one man most directly responsible for the modern PC golf game," Bruce Carver.

Better luck next time.

Mindy Cook
mindy@accesssoftware.com

Bruce and Rex? Parking lot, five minutes.

Could you please tell me what specific day E3 is open to the public?

Patrick Bass
Mr.Chuckles@juno.com

Unfortunately, this year's E3 (Electronic Entertainment Exposition) isn't open to the public. **Next Generation** will, however, make the journey to Atlanta to bring all the news and new game previews back for you.

Recently, I was watching M2 (MTV's spin-off channel) when I saw a video by Fluke, one of the techno music groups featured on *WipeOut XL*'s soundtrack. Most of the whole video was comprised of awesome footage of *WipeOut XL* gameplay. Needless to say, I was extremely surprised and pleased. Then, not a week later, I got my latest issue of *Rolling Stone*. Imagine my surprise when I found that *WipeOut XL*'s soundtrack was listed as the #3 alternative album!

Because CDs have become the storage medium of choice for games, it has enabled music to be used in games like never before. *WipeOut XL* was just the beginning — I'm eagerly waiting to see what Square, whose music has always been outstanding on the cartridge format, will do with the music in *FFVII*. Other game developers will surely follow, especially with the attention *WipeOut XL*'s soundtrack is receiving. Music may bring gaming into the mainstream culture in the U.S. the way it currently is in Japan. Could it happen?

Kelly Mummert
kmum@ix.netcom.com

Certainly, as game companies continue to use more and more "real world" talent in their titles (musicians, artists, novelists, sportsmen, or — in the case of Activision — ex-CIA chiefs), the line between videogames and other forms of entertainment will be blurred. This has to mean that more people are exposed to the world of gaming — and this has to be a good thing.

Just so you know, I bought a PlayStation the first day it came out. Shortly thereafter, I also started experiencing the "skipping phenomenon" with my sacred game console. At first, it was just an annoyance, but it soon evolved to the point that the games wouldn't even load at all. After my PlayStation locked up on me, I reluctantly sent it back to Sony to be fixed. They were kind enough to fix it for free and they returned it to me in perfect working order.

It turns out that on the first-gen machines, the CD laser wasn't properly calibrated. The tech rep that I talked to said that this is a common problem and that I was wise to return it. He also suggested that it would help to give it sufficient ventilation (i.e. take it out of my entertainment center), as the first-gen consoles tend to overheat.

If anyone reading this notices that their PlayStation is skipping, please call Sony and explain the situation. Thanks for your time,

Jason Land
copulate@ix.netcom.com

Following Craig Lyon's letter in **NG 27** concerning the problem of "skipping" PlayStations, literally hundreds of other PlayStation owners have contacted us to



Skipping PlayStations? Sony has some gamers to answer to

complain of similar problems. Jason's letter is unique in that he had a Sony employee admit that there was a "problem" — confessing that the first batch of PlayStations shipped to the U.S. had improperly calibrated lasers.

On the one hand, the problem is now largely solved: It is very unlikely that any of these faulty PlayStations are sitting on U.S. store shelves. But on the other hand, many PlayStation gamers are only discovering the problem now — after the year warranty has expired.

Next Generation is speaking to Sony about the problem. We'll let you know what they say in the next issue.

On your web page, I saw a link stating that you were looking for a new writer to join your staff. When I clicked for more details, I received an error. I am interested in this position so I am requesting information on this job opening. I would like to know what you need in order for me to be considered. Thank you.

Jae H. Sim
MD2HD@msn.com

Yes indeed, **Next Generation** is looking for a new writer. All the usual qualifications are required (great writing skills and a vast knowledge of the gaming scene), but the ideal candidate will have a good technological background too. Do you know: how to take apart and put together a PC? How the Internet works (and why occasionally it appears not to)? The difference between RISC and CISC? What z-buffering, tri-linear mip-mapping, and alpha chanelling are? What makes one 3D accelerator card better than another? How to fix our soda machine? How DVD differs fundamentally from CD?

If you know all this (and a whole lot more besides), you could be the person we're looking for. To apply for this full-time position in the **Next Generation** San Francisco offices, send a resume and a 500-word review of a game that you don't like (explaining how it could be better) to: Technical Editor Application, c/o Chris Charla, Imagine Publishing, 150 North Hill Drive, Brisbane, CA 94005.

Great article about *Bomberman* for the PC. I love the game as much as you guys do, so the thought of playing that masterpiece over the Internet is very exciting. But your "100 Greatest Games of All Time" issue rated *Super Bomberman 2* at #3 and Tetris at #2. **NG 27**'s cover has it the other way around. Which is correct?

Joey Tayler
PGVW50B@prodigy.com

Oops. *Super Bomberman 2* is indeed #3 greatest game of all time, not #2. That's official.

Your recent alpha preview of *Blood* was quite favorable, but I would like to clear up some misinformation. The *Duke Nukem* team had absolutely nothing to do with the design or development of *Blood*.

corresponding

Blood was designed at Q Studios by a team of talented game developers and was completely external to 3D Realms.

Nick Newhard
nick@lith.com

Thanks for writing to us to put the record straight.

Midway started *Doom 64* from scratch. It has new monsters, new weapons,



***Doom 64* — it's more of a Midway creation than an Id creation**

and all the levels and art originated at Midway. Its also added new scripting abilities. How is it *Doom*?

Remy Saville
titan@pacificcoast.net

Um, good point. The new stuff was "approved" by Id, but it's not necessarily an Id game. Still, it's the nearest Nintendo 64 gets (so far) and it ain't that bad at all.

Publishing e-mail addresses at the end of a letter is like letting the world know how to contact that person. This opens the door to "spamming" and hate mail. Could I humbly request that **NG** review its e-mail policy?

Marc Hemingway

Yes, it's unfortunate that a few people have received hostile and rude correspondence from immature readers. Hopefully, there are more instances in which **NG** readers have been able to partake in their own interesting and lively debate — certainly, this was the aim when we decided to print e-mail addresses.

If you write to **NG** and don't want your e-mail address printed, simply say so in the message and we will withhold it.

What problem does Sony have with us playing import games? In your January issue ("Movers and Shakers"), you state that Sony "swooped on" companies that produce devices that enable the playing of import, as well as pirated, games. I totally understand Sony's wanting to stop the distribution of pirated games: It's illegal and unfair to those who would eventually have to pay more for their legal PlayStation games, because of those who were buying the illegal copies. However, ever since I purchased a PlayStation, I never quite understood Sony's problem with the U.S. playing (legally imported) Japanese games on the American system.

I could be wrong, but technically doesn't Sony (and the third-party companies) get the profits from the imported games, considering that the importers had to first purchase these games from them?

Jason Feliciano
jaysin@juno.com.

There are several reasons why international console manufacturers try to keep individual countries (or "territories" separate). 1) Nearly all games involve or feature some form of creative license (be it a character, movie tie-in, coin-op conversion, or whatever) and very often these licenses are sold to different companies around the world. For example, Playmates will publish *MDK* in the U.S., whereas everywhere else in the world it will be known as an Interplay game. In the U.K., Capcom and LucasArts games are published by Virgin. It's rare that one company secures the rights to all of a license all over the world, and hence cannot sell the same game in different countries. 2) Most game companies try to customize each game to each country (language, style of music, and so on) and this takes time to do. So in between, say, a Japanese and an American version of a game being released, the company will be keen to prevent "foreign" versions of a game being sold, because they're regarded as second-grade product, and they dilute the impact of the game's official launch. 3) National divisions of international companies generally operate as separate, autonomous businesses. They don't want to lose any potential sales — even if it's to their sister company (or even parent company) in another country.

On page 48 of **NG 26**, the item "Game Over: A.K.A One Fatality Too Many" implies that the feature "Do videogames screw you up?" from **NG 10** is available at http://www.next-generation.com/. It may be there, but I couldn't find it. Any hints?

Jeff Koechling
jck@bdi.com

It's there — check under "Features." In fact, this — and pretty much every feature **Next Generation** has ever published — can be found and downloaded at Next Generation Online, at http://www.next-generation.com.

On the cover of your February 97 issue, you claim that *Unreal* could be the best looking game of 1997. Don't you think it's a little early to be making judgments like that? I mean, last February, you didn't have the best-looking game of 1996 on the cover... Oh wait a minute, nevermind.

Daniel Cunningham
cunning9@erols.com

Check out **Next Generation** back issues on page 32.

I can't help but find it facinating that, in this era of humankind, we still have witch hunts and witch hunters who are apt to wave the banner of "in our best interests." Sure Senator Lieberman seems to have his heart in the right place, but we all know that the road to Hell is paved with good intentions.

I do understand that full disclosure of game content can help parents make an informed decision as to which games are appropriate for their child, but most parents only need ask the sales person if a given game is violent or call a 1-800 to get a description of the games content. Also, the Internet is the primary source of screen shots which can let parents actually see the game and from what I have seen, violent games tend to have violent screeen shots.

What Senator Lieberman isn't saying is that most parents are too damn lazy to investigate their childs hobby. I saw a mother buy an advance copy of *Turok: Dinosaur Hunter* for her 8-year old son and not even flinch. The M-17 rating plainly displayed on all the boxes and posters were all over the store. Either she knew the rating and knew that her son understood the difference between videogame violence and real violence *or* she was oblivious and didn't care. Either way, the existing rating system is more than enough disclosure as to the content of the product. Parents that care will investigate and those that don't care aren't going to suddenly start caring, even if you soak the game package in blood as a "final" alert that this game is violent. You can't legislate parenting and this is the real issue.

Senator Lieberman should spend his time focusing on *real* goverment issues (there are too many to list) and put down the torch and pitch fork. There are no witches here. Just games.

Randy Roth
IHNMAIMS@aol.com

We agree that parents need to take more interest in what their kids play.

I just finished reading your **NG 26** which was, as usual, enjoyable and informative. I would especially like to thank you for those Enos letters. They were in not irritating or mundane. I did not want to rip that page from your mag and set it aflame.

Paul D. Carlson
carlsonw@nbnet.nb.ca

We're thinking of renaming this corner of **Next Generation** "Sarcasm Corner." Readers, what do you think?

Next Month



Is your favorite game company ripping *you* off?

Have you ever wondered why your favorite audio CD, the one that features the artist collecting the multimillion dollar salary, only costs $14 and *Mortal Kombat Trilogy* costs $59? Next month, Next Generation follows the trail of cash and tells you who's laughing all the way to the bank.

Cha-ching.

Next Generation #30
on sale May 20, 1997.

Smart readers have already subscribed. To find out how you too can save money and guarantee your copy, turn to the insert between pages 32 and 33.

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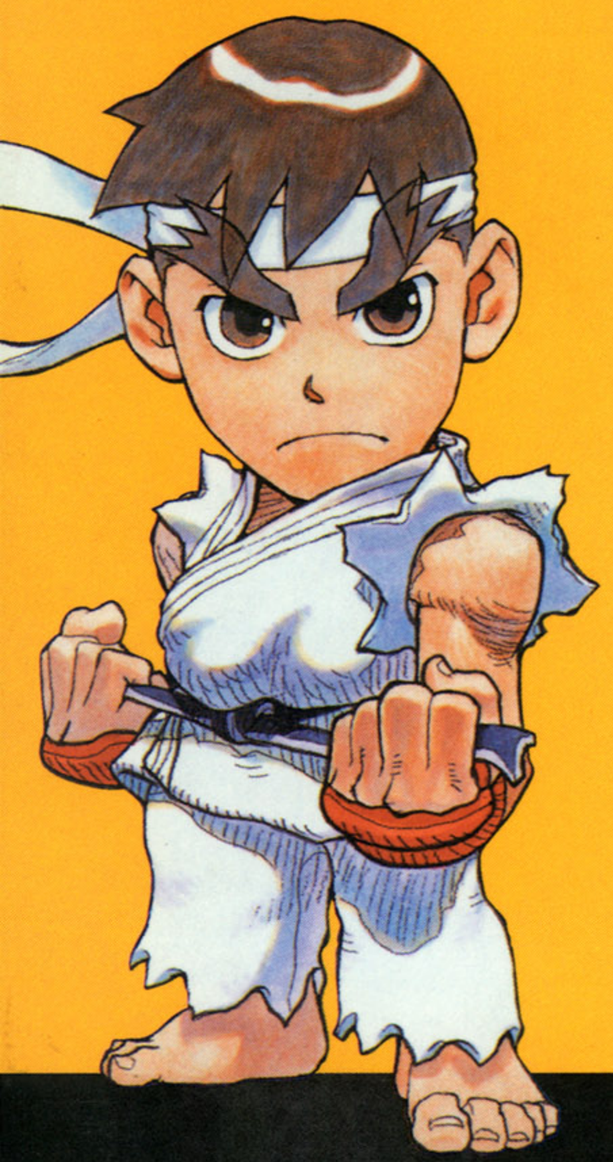
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