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NEXT GENERATION

Leading edge computer and video games

September 1996

CONFIDENTIAL

Contents: **The TOP 100**
VIDEOGAMES
of ALL TIME

Including: Quake, Space Invaders, Tetris,
Street Fighter 2, Asteroids,
Sonic the Hedgehog, and
Super Mario 64 (but not Myst).

Status: **Extremely** controversial

Volume two

21

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The Top 100 Games of all time

Some games are labeled as "classics." Some games are deemed "benchmarks." And, of course, we've all got our personal favorites. There are games that we lose weeks of our lives to. There are games that we dream about. There are games that we personally want to take to the designers of all this FMV rubbish and say "See? See? THIS is how you do it! There are games that we know - with no doubt at all - that we're better at than anyone else in the world. And there are games that we love. But which are the best ever? The definitive Next Generation Top 100 starts on page 36.

opening



NEXT
GENERATION

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September 1996

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Retrogaming: hip or hype?

Eugene Jarvis is the creator of 1981's *Defender* and 1982's *Rastan*, two of arcade gaming's all-time classics. He's still in the business, at the helm of Midway's *Cyber World*. So does the veteran believe that games are as good as they used to be?



The top 100 video and computer games of all time

Some games you love to play, some games you live to play. With an eye toward both past glories and modern marvels, in praise of both style and substance, spectacularly unafraid of controversy, *Next Generation* lists the 100 best games ever.

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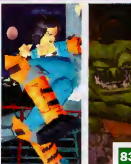
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Finals

Without reviews, life itself would be impossible — no, wait a minute, that was chemistry. *Anyway*, *Mario 64*, *PlanetWings 64* (N64), *Nomco Museum vol. 1*, *Fade to Black*, *Space Hawk* (PS-X); *Legend of Doss*, *Virtual Open Tennis* (Saturn); *Copier* (DC); *Fire Figs*, *PH40*, *Longbow*, *King's Chase* (PC); *Discove 2* (Mac); *MarsBlitz*, *X-erts*, *World Series Baseball '98* (Genesis), *Star Gladiator*, *Gun Blade NY* (Arcade)

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NIT IN SEPTEMBER.

"New games stink! Old games are still the best!" So claim the ever-growing cult of retrogamers. Are they right? Or are they just suffering from nostalgia? One man who sees both sides of the story is Midway's Eugene Jarvis, who — as designer of 1980's *Defender* and last year's *Cruis'n USA* — has been in the business for 20 years. So, Eugene...

Retrogaming: HIP OR HYPE?

"In the late '70s and early '80s, it was like being Elvis — the first 'rock and roll guy' — or the Beatles..."



In compiling the definitive all-time Top 100 of computer and videogames (page 36), the staff of *Next Generation* concisely found itself comparing new games to old. And this led to

arguments. Certainly, such pioneering classics as *Defender*, *Golstions*, *Pac-Man*, *Robotron*, *Asteroids*, and *Space Invaders* were great fun at the time, and deserve massive credit for braving new gaming ground. But compared to 1996's state-of-the-art, do they still really cut the mustard?

We concluded that some did, and some didn't (and, as usual, our decisions are destined to spark controversy). But the debate is only destined to increase in vehemence, as the retrogaming cult gathers more and more momentum.

One man who's had a videogame insider's perspective from the very beginning to the present day is the outspoken Eugene Jarvis. *Defender* and *Robotron* are undisputed classics (he's even got his own fanpage, check out <http://www.cs.uregina.ca/~bakay/jarvis/jarvis.html>) while his *Cruis'n USA* is one of Nintendo's key titles in the launch of Nintendo 64.

Next Generation met with Jarvis at Midway's Chicago headquarters to talk oldies, goldies, and the future of videogaming.

Golden oldies

NG: Do you think that the old arcade games regarded as "classics" have really survived the test of time? Or are we just looking through the rose-colored spectacles of nostalgia?

Eugene: No, some of those old games really still are a lot of fun.

I'm kinda biased, but I still play *Robotron* two or three times every day. Some of the newer game designers who I work with — kids who are just 20 or 21 years old — are getting into *Robotron* for the first time. They are almost surprised to discover that it's got some great action, great play mechanics, and, perhaps most important of all, I think, great tension.

The essence of the videogame is survival of the fittest. So when playing a game, it's the game versus just you and your survival instinct — and that's the most powerful instinct a human being

talking



"Many in the game business believe that all you have to do is bullshit a parent — who doesn't know crap about games — into buying your box, and then you move on"

has. The will to live overrides everything.

So, in my opinion, the essence of a great videogame is to exploit that instinct, to really get the player's adrenaline going.

NG: Is this what makes so many of the old classics so exciting to play?

Eugene: Yeah. If you look at some of the classic games — Asteroids, Space Invaders, Defender — from that era of the early '80s and late '70s, they really exploited that survival instinct in a very simple and primal way. They were tapping directly into your brain.

NG: Do today's videogames tap into this survival instinct as well as the old classics did?

Eugene: Well, in a symbolic way, "death" is present in all games in the sense that you can't continue playing. But maybe it's done in a less direct way. In *Cruis'n USA*, if you win the race you get to continue racing — so you are driving as fast as you can to stay "alive."

But when you win the race in a lot of driving games, then just a big screen comes up and says "Congratulations! Game over!" So that does kind of change the player's motive. Now you're after a score more than sheer survival.

NG: Many people believe that today's games aren't any more fun to play than the classics from the late 1970s and the early 1980s. These people argue that sure, today's games look better — but they aren't any more fun to play.

Do you believe this? And if so, shouldn't we have moved forward?

Eugene: Well, I think there were some damned good games back at the start, but I'd have to say that games like *Street Fighter*, *Mortal Kombat*, and *Killer Instinct* are pretty damned good, too. So I don't believe that all modern games are rubbish.

NG: But would you agree that modern games aren't necessarily any better than old ones?

Eugene: What you have to remember is that when games like *Space Invaders*, *Korote Champ*, *Pole Position*, and *Defender* were first created, they

were the very first games in that style. Nothing like them had ever appeared before. We went from a blank screen to a game.

Now, *Daytona USA*'s leap from *Pole Position* isn't as big as *Pole Position*'s leap from nothing at all. So, perhaps it's inevitable that even though *Daytona USA* is a superior game, people aren't as excited by it as when *Pole Position* first appeared.

The late '70s and early '80s was a time when a lot of these genres and game styles were formulated. It was like being the first Elvis — the first "rock and roll guy" — or the Beatles. We had an open field, and the most obviously powerful concepts were soon exploited.

Since then, game designers have had little choice but to build on existing concepts — as most of the choice virgin real estate was gobbled up years ago.

NG: But that doesn't mean that the gameplay has to stay stagnant.

Eugene: Sure. *Daytona USA* is essentially *Pole Position* with better graphics. We're not progressing on the game side, we're progressing with the simulation, we're progressing with rendering accuracy. But the game side is not really going anywhere.

NG: Another factor may be that — certainly with arcade games — it's important that people should immediately understand what a game's goals are and how they play it. With this in mind, it makes sense to make games similar to titles with which players are already familiar.

Eugene: Absolutely. In the arcades you need something that is very transparent, and something that novice players can pick up in 10 seconds or less. So all this work's going into doing the same games better and better, while such great frontiers as, say, creating a game in which you can have a real conversation with a computer player, are left untouched.

The next frontier

NG: So where is the real innovation going to come from?

Eugene: That's a huge, huge question. And most of the effort seems to be focused on just faster and faster hardware, and more and more polygons — and I think SGI basically designed themselves out of business with Nintendo 64. I





There are no windows at Midway's office. "If you want something cool to look at," explains Jarvis, "well, you have to make it happen on your screen."

mean, who's gonna buy a \$50,000 box when they've shown you can do it for \$250 bucks? [Laughs.] It's a great engineering triumph, but maybe the end of their company. And all the while I sit here saying, "What does that mean for game design?"

Another big problem we face is that because videogames have become such a big business, a lot of people are putting out "product," and not games. Games are designed by marketing suits, not designers. It's just about marketing. It's about, "Get a big license, then hype it." We're spoiled by having the most ignorant consumers in the world — parents who are buying things for their kids — so many people in the business believe that all you have to do is bullshit a parent who doesn't know crap about games into buying your box, and then you move on.

NG: So where do you see hope?

Eugene: I look at *Dem, Quake, Descent*, and *Duke Nukem 3D* — games where we're getting into network play, we're getting into the Internet. And eventually the Internet will be good enough that you can have some fun with huge, huge multiplayer environments.

But even this is retro. It's almost like we've become disenchanting with computer artificial intelligence and we've gone back to human opponents, which was actually the way videogaming started with *Pong* and *Space War!*. It's like we've come full circle, and are again saying "Wow, human opponents are really cool!"

NG: In addition to human opponents, will we see a return to "back-to-basics" game design?
Eugene: Probably. Certainly, I think there's a lot of disenchantment right now with 3D. At first it's like "Oh wow, this is really cool! I'm in a car and there are lots of polygons!" But a lot of games end up being just infrastructures, they're just environments — and not really games.

Sure, there are a lot of interesting graphics, there are 28 different ways to play the game, you can play it without traffic, driving backward, with a camera coming out of your exhaust pipe. All

this stuff, and all these options, but it kind of all disguises the fact that there's really nothing... there's no game there. I call it "geekware."

It's the reason why you get so many options to design your own course, or fiddle with the game world. It's because the guy who was designing the game couldn't ever figure out anything that was cool, so he's having you decide it for him.

NG: So, is too much freedom a bad thing?

Eugene: Yeah. We forget that games are about limitations. Limitations are what really make games. Take the game of chess — possibly the greatest game of all. You're on this stupid board and you've got 64 squares, you can't move in three dimensions, you can't move off the board, and the pieces only move in certain, really horrible ways that are totally stifling to your creativity. Yet, here is this incredibly rich game.

NG: So should this same philosophy of strict limitations be applied to videogames?

Eugene: A lot of videogame design is about the limitations, it's not about simulating the freedom of reality. I think we're seduced by simulation. And, why are people playing games? Because reality sucks. That's why they're sitting in front of their computer and playing games. The real world is exactly what gamers don't want — they want something cooler than the real world.

Game designers have to decide what the hell it is that they're designing and what their game is. Many designers try to design an entire universe and end up with something very wide, but very shallow. But in truth, the games that are really successful are those that are very narrow, yet very deep. Games like *Tetris*, or *Street Fighter* — which isn't really even two dimensional, let alone 3D. Both players simply walk up and down just the one line. And yet this is an extremely powerful concept, because once you limit the guy to that line, you make him face the enemy at all times. There's no getting away. And then you can devote all your programming effort to all the cool nuances and all the myriad of things you can do on that stupid one line.

But if I were to propose this game idea (*Street Fighter 2*, remember) to some marketing guy — the guy who makes the decisions about whether the game gets made or not — and explained this concept in which players move in one dimension along a line, frankly he'd say "This is the biggest pile of shit I've ever heard of. What the %&@!\$ are you talking about?"

NG: So are 3D games fundamentally flawed?

Eugene: No, it's just that it's very, very difficult to do them well. One example that worked well was *Descent*, which I truly believe is a mind-expanding game.

NG: Here's a theory: Do you think it's possible that in the same way limitations — and not freedoms — make a great game design, it was



"The real world is exactly what gamers don't want. They want something cooler than the real world"

talking



The smiling Eugene Jarvis is currently working on *Craie's World*. "It's like *Craie's USA*, but taken to the next limit!"

"The more you flesh out a story, the more you remove the player from the game. It's kinda like 'Oh, the outcome has already been determined.' So what's the point?"

technological limitations that forced yourself and other game designers of the classic era to dig deeper into gameplay issues? Could it be that in the same way too much freedom in a game detracts from the gameplay, game designers of today are spoiled by hardware that enables them to create whatever world they chose? As opposed to having to work with just 2D, 16 colors, and simple environments?

Eugene: That is a very, very good point. With a game like, say, *Doom*, there are only roughly two or maybe three "threats" onscreen at any one time. With *Space Invaders* or *Asteroids* there are 20 or 30 simultaneously. And *Robotron* carried this to the final extreme of putting 150 "threats" out there, converging on you from all sides. And with the limitations of the hardware, if we wanted to have 150 enemies, we had to stick to just a single screen game.

But that confinement turned out to be the essence of the whole play. You were trapped, you couldn't run away. You were there, they were coming, so make some shit happen or die! And by forcing you in that room, it really concentrates the game.

It's not that I'm down on exploration, but a lot of games today are all about exploration — exploring the cool graphics, mainly. And the result is that the game itself is diluted.

Back to basics

NG: What role do you think plot or storyline plays in a successful videogame?

Eugene: I think it is important to have a story. But it doesn't have to be a Hollywood script. You really just need a story that is simple, something that tells you why you're there and what you're doing.

The danger for designers is that they get hooked into their story, and they forget that storytelling is a linear, narrative-type thing. And the more you flesh out the story, the more you remove the interactivity, and the more you remove the player from the game. It's kinda like "Oh, the outcome has already been determined. So what's the point!"

Stories should be regarded in the same way as soundtracks and sound effects. They support the game, enhancing the reality and the feeling.

NG: What is the one piece of advice that you'd offer new game designers?

Eugene: It's kind of what I said earlier. Designers shouldn't create an infrastructure. They should create a game, and work on the action. People spend so much time on the attract mode, and the title screen, and the FMV,

and all that shit — but instead they should spend time on the game itself.

The prime thing is the playing of the game. Make that cool. Put your work into making a rich, interactive, deep environment that the player can affect rather than all this packaging that kinda cloaks the product.

And figure out what the hell your game is. So often, us designers become too enraptured with simulation. We want to do so much. We want to offer this incredibly free world in which you can do this, and you do that, and you have this world and that world, and you can climb into the tank if you want to, and then you can become the prime minister and control the economy, and do all this shit.

But you only have so much time to design something, and so at some time point you have to decide if you're making 17 bad subgames or one really good game.

NG: Do you think that anyone other than a hard-core gamer can really design games?

Eugene: A lot of squares get really excited about videogame design when they hear that there are wheelbarrows of cash involved. But the bottom line is if you're in it for money, your game is going to suck — big time. To be a designer you've got to play games until your social life vanishes. You should live games, dream games, and die games in an all-consuming obsession. If you want to make cash, get into real estate, or pose in a suit from nine to five in some bloated corporocracy. Videogames are way too much work.

If I'm interviewing an artist or coder and they ask about the retirement plan, I know they'll never make it. Their priority is a house in the suburbs, not game design. Basically, the Midway design studios are a high-tech dump. It's a warehouse converted into offices and cubicles. Nobody gets a window, cause there aren't any. The philosophy is if you want something cool to look at, make something happen on your screen.

NG: Who will design the next great game?
Eugene: The beauty of this business is that as a programmer, you're only as good as your last line of code. Right now, somewhere, there are these new guys in their garages, and they're just gonna totally blow away all these big, bloated corporations. It's great!





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Videogame news from the U.S., Europe, and Japan

Big in Japan: Nintendo 64 launches at last

The wait is over, for Japanese gamers at least



Sunday, June 23, Akihabara, Tokyo (top left). Long lines form at around 10 a.m. for Nintendo 64 (above left) although most enthusiasts had almost entirely disappeared by about lunchtime. Game shop employees patrolled the streets with megaphones announcing that all machines had to be bought with Super Mario 64. Not surprisingly, most buyers didn't need persuading.

STOP

Tom Kalinske leaves Sega of America
Did he jump, or was he pushed? Of course, no one at Sega's saying. (But on Monday, July 15, it was confirmed that Tom Kalinske, chief executive officer of Sega of America, was no longer with the company. Word around the console is that Sega Japan has been displeased with Sega of America's performance since the launch of Saturn, and is now making sweeping management changes with a view to having one final console on the market this holiday season. It is anticipated that a Japanese executive will be named as Kalinske's successor.

Time Warner to Quit Game Business
According to reports in the European press, the giant media conglomerate says it is open to offers of a sale. This follows the company's decision to offload its console division (formerly known as Atari Games) to Williams this last April.

Videogame Expo Goes International
The organizers of a Pittsburgh-based exhibition on the history of videogames are planning a nationwide tour next year for the public. Some 20,000 people have already attended "Videotopia" which features more than 200 coin-ops, game machines, and arcade. Playable games are included ranging from Computer Space to Alone Racer. So check out your local museum and play a couple of classics...

Nintendo's 64-bit machine hit Japanese high streets on Sunday, June 23. Unlike Saturn's and PlayStation's spectacular launches in late 1994, Nintendo's big day was a far call from the sleeping bags and gas stoves that dogged the streets of Akihabara the night prior to the Super Famicom's (Super NES's) launch on November 21, 1990. A few lines formed in Akihabara (the largest gathering of gameheads outside the giant Laoc computer center), but most people were served before lunchtime.

But this shouldn't be taken as a sign of disappointing sales, however. According to retailer information, Nintendo still managed to sell a commendable 300,000 on its very first day of sales, and had deliberately avoided the street chaos that ensued six years ago (the story of one hapless Japanese game otaku getting mugged for his newly purchased Super Famicom is now part of videogame legend).

Instead, Nintendo distributed its machine through a far wider retail network. As opposed to just game shops and toy stores, this time Nintendo made its machine available at convenience stores throughout Japan and had already accepted hundreds of thousands of pre-release bookings. In other words, this time it was prepared for a sell-out.

Incidentally, **Next Generation's** intrepid reporter did notice that the lines that formed were composed of not only Japanese but also a fair number of Westerners with wallets stuffed full of yen. Japanese shopping etiquette prevented anyone buying

more than one unbooked machine per head, but there were enough machines bought by Westerners to keep Tokyo's Fax Ex offices busy.

As well as Nintendo making 300,000 N64s available on day one, it also shipped enough copies of Super Mario 64 to allow for one per machine. Early sales reports indicate that, unsurprisingly, everyone who bought the machine also picked up a copy of Mario (in fact, most shops would only sell the machine if the game was being purchased, and vice versa) with 60% of the early adopters plumping for PilotWings 64, too. The only other game available on day one was a Japanese chess (Shogi) game from third-party developer Seta (echoing the release of the obscure Bitmap Brothers Amiga platformer Bombulz during the launch week of the Super Famicom). Even stocks of extra joypads were selling out (in all colors), despite the fact that none of the three games available feature a two-player mode.

Nintendo's N64 sales plan for Japan is ambitious. By the end of June it planned to sell 500,000 units, an additional 500,000 units shipped in July, and a further 500,000 units will arrive in August (totaling 1,500,000 by the end of summer). Equal numbers of Super Mario 64 will be released to satisfy demand.

Most significantly, Nintendo has announced that it will manufacture 5 million Nintendo 64s by the end of March 1997, aiming to sell 3.6 million of these in Japan, 1.4 million in the U.S., and the rest in Europe.

This is actually very ambitious when you consider that it has taken

When is it?

After three years of waiting (and numerous last-minute delays), it's the date when the Nintendo 64 finally launches in the U.S. and gamers finally get their hands on Super Mario 64 and Pilotwings 64.

Japanese shopping etiquette prevented anyone buying more than one unbooked machine per head



PilotWings and Super Mario 64 are the only two launch titles for Nintendo 64 so far



The N64 cartridges are smaller than Super NES carts, but they weigh more

breaking

It is...

September 30, when the first batch of 250,000 Nintendo 64's goes on sale across the U.S. If you haven't already done so, Next Generation strongly advises reserving your machine ahead of time

"Mario has a very broad appeal. I don't know if we'll see 35- and 40-year-olds playing it, but gamers in general will recognize its high quality"

George Harrison,
Nintendo of America

Sony 18 months to sell 2.5 million PlayStation into Japan. But even if Nintendo does manage to shift this many N64s, it will still have its work cut out competing with the number of Super Famicoms sold to date — a staggering 16 million units.

Quite how Nintendo's Japanese strategy will play out has been speculation until recently. Shortly before *Next Generation* went to press, Chairman Hiroshi Yamauchi announced that 20 games would be released in Japan before the end of the year. He also made a point of admitting that only three of these could possibly get close to reaching the quality of *Super Mario 64*. In light of the number of filler titles on their way (Time Warner's *Endorfun*, retitled *Cu-On-Ps* and to be released by T&E Soft) this implies that Nintendo will be counting on its own internal development highly.

As far as the U.S. launch is concerned, *Next Generation* spoke exclusively with George Harrison, Nintendo of America's director of marketing. In answer to speculation that Nintendo may be keen to drop the price of Nintendo 64 to compete directly with the \$199 Saturn and PlayStation, he stated that "We're not necessarily interested in driving the price down. We know there are a limited number of units and that it is popularly priced." So those gamers who got burned by Saturn's freefalling pricepoint shouldn't worry about the same thing happening with Nintendo 64. But then, George Harrison would say that — it's his job.

Harrison is also keen to dispel the notion that Nintendo 64 is for kids, and that PlayStation and Saturn are the systems for older gamers. "If you look at PlayStation and Saturn, they are also launching character-based games like the *Sonic* game" he argues. "Simultaneously, Nintendo of America is looking at the higher end of the market with sports games."

But surely Mario is Nintendo 64's primary weapon, and — hard-core gamers aside — he has to appeal to young kids more than adults? Harrison: "Mario skews a little younger for the U.S. audience, sure, but for the Japanese domestic audience it's pretty much all the family. And even in the U.S., games like *Donkey Kong Country* and *Mario* have a very broad appeal. I don't know if we'll see 35- and 40-year-olds playing it, but gamers in general will recognize its high quality.

"There was a time when everyone



Waiting is fine in all part of being a gamer in Japan. But the wait is worth it.

was focused on realism and how real games could be made to look with FMV," Harrison argues. "But in the end, it turns out that this isn't what gamers care about. They care about a game that will take them away into a fantasy world instead."

And how threatened does Nintendo feel by the prospect of budget games released for PlayStation, and possibly Saturn? "You get what you pay for," Harrison replies. "The reason why there will be budget software on Sony PlayStation is that there are quite a few titles out there which are not especially noteworthy."

In the U.S., many stores are refusing to take any more N64 pre-orders, and it seems demand will outstrip supply, at least for the first months of N64's U.S. launch. "For us, a little shortage is a good thing, but a big one is bad," Harrison says. But either way, there are worse problems to have, right? The man from Nintendo smiles...



Mihibara is still the world's electronics center, but Nintendo didn't rely on it exclusively as it did for the Super NES's launch.





The \$3,000 controller pack (memory card shown below) was sold in most stores with the original game.

Small but perfectly formed

Those who have only previously seen the Nintendo 64 in photos (anyone outside of the game industry, basically), will probably be surprised out how petit the Nintendo 64 is. It measures just 9.1" in width, 7.1" from front to back and 1.8" in height — a slender build attributable to the fact that there is no CD drive to accommodate.

It also looks rather plasticky, with big, chunky joy-pad parts and a large on/off switch. It is clear that, unlike the 32-bit machines, the N64 has not been designed with lifestyle pretensions, aimed at 20-30 year olds, but as a functional gamebox.

A cursory glance at the machine reveals that the power pack is a separate unit that slots into the back of the machine. There is also a "jumper pak" inside the console memory expansion slot which has "do no remove" written on it. Next Generation suspects this slot will be for the proposed RAM cart peripheral which may be used to give extra memory support to the 64DD when it is released, most likely next year.

Incidentally, neither Mario nor *Picchi Wings* uses the memory card which was also on sale (these games both include battery back-up). This was sold almost exclusively with Seta's *Shogi* game.

Like the N64 itself, the carts are surprisingly small, about the same size as Super NES carts, and they also come in similar cardboard packaging. Next Generation has yet to open up the carts to see if Nintendo's claims of 64-Mbit RDMs are true. Considering the immense graphic variety in both titles, rumors that Mario is, in fact, 96 Mbits are unsubstantiated.



The unusual look of Nintendo's controller is complemented by the feel of it in your hands.



What a relief! Next Generation staffers are still in slight disbelief at how fast a game starts on N64. And plug-ins and hook-ups are also a snap.

In the studio

Games, games, and more games. But who's working on what?

Blizzard's *StarCraft* — the eagerly awaited project from the makers of *WarCraft 2* — has benefited from a massive facelift since its debut at E.

The new version has abandoned Blizzard's trademark hand-drawn art in favor of a futuristic rendered look. Explosions are stunning and there are some new twists to the gameplay, including surface warfare, inner-station warfare and, of course, space warfare. *StarCraft* is still on track for this fall, and we can't wait.



Psygnosis' eagerly anticipated PlayStation racer *Formula One* has been delayed until later in the fall, as the developers attempt to ball on last minute touches.

In addition to the normal routine of last minute tweaks and bug-fixing, the game has been subjected to complex graphic changes due to restrictions on cigarette and alcohol advertising. As well as having been deemed "inappropriate" by Sony, in some states such ads would actually be illegal.

Id Software is developing a "Rendition Ready" version of *Quake* to take advantage of Rendition's Verite 3D-accelerator hardware, before it works on other platforms, including DirectX. Expect to see perspective correction and bi-linear filtered texture mapping within the new version. Sold John Carmak of Id, "Verite will be the premiere platform for *Quake*."

Tahara is planning a new series of *Toshinden* games, exclusively for Saturn. Although parallel PlayStation development will continue, games on the two platforms will be markedly different. Tahara is hoping to tap into the huge fighting game market — created by *Virtua Fighter 2* — among Saturn owners in Japan. The series, called *Toshinden URA*, will use Sega's own 3D polygon graphics library. *URA* (the word) has combat connotations in Japanese, although the real meaning of the abbreviation is the subject of a quest within the games. The first in the *URA* series will be out early this fall.



Virtua Fighter 3 has started testing in a Japanese arcade. According to testers in Ikebukuro, Japan, the game has a fourth button which enables characters to dodge blows at the last moment. Gamers at the Gyu arcade have also found that in two-player mode, when the same characters are chosen to fight one another, each wears a completely different outfit (as opposed to just wearing differently colored clothes). For example, the new character Kai is normally in a Kimono, but her alter-ego wears a school uniform.

An MDK update from Shiny Entertainment's Dave Perry: "Regarding MDK, somehow, nothing has gone wrong so far: We have sniper zooming from 1 pixel to full screen in perfect pixel detail (with really bizarre-looking enemies), we have nonclipping worlds (no visual pop-up of scenery), we can demonstrate new intelligence code, we have our own 3D sound system, we have polygon collision detection working (you can shoot between someone's legs), and yes, we can now demonstrate shooting a guy's nose off." Smart. MDK is scheduled for completion later this year. Check out <http://www.shiny.com/> for more information.

breaking

Sega boosts Saturn at Tokyo Toy Show

Once again, Sega dominates Japan's premiere toy event with VF3 news

AM2's Yu Suzuki made a special appearance to talk about Virtua Fighter 3's two new characters



Bandai's Saturn Turbo enables Super NES owners to see the company's new range of smaller, cheaper carts and to link up via the dual port (center). AM2's Yu Suzuki introduces one of VF3's new characters, sumo wrestler Takaraashi

Spread over three days earlier this summer, 1996's Tokyo Toy Show (the Tokyo Omotchiyō) was a slight disappointment compared to previous events. Though mostly dedicated toward toys, one quarter of the show covered videogames, and the absence of Sony and Nintendo (typical for the event) meant that once again, Sega stole the show with relative ease.

The majority of Sega's presence was devoted to Saturn releases. Top of the list was the half-complete Saturn version of *Fighting Vipers*. AM2, which undertook the conversion, has employed Gouraud shading to smooth any rough polygon edges, giving the game a neat graphic edge. Less smooth, however, was the camera motion, which didn't quite match the speed and fluidity of the coin-op (most noticeable was the

slowdown that occurred when a player is knocked out). Considering TV is only 50% complete, however, AM2 seems to be doing a first class job — by means of comparison, the incredible *Virtua Fighter 2* conversion was of a similar quality at this stage of development.

Making a special appearance was AM2's Yu Suzuki, discussing the forthcoming *Virtua Fighter 3* (NG 17). Two new characters will be introduced for the game soon, but unlike the new VF2 fighters (Lion and Shun Di — both non-Japanese), the new combatants will have a traditional Japanese look. One will be a girl wearing a kimono, the other is a sumo wrestler, who at the moment goes by the name of Takaraashi (it is likely this will change by the end of development).



Nintendo's stand included *Demolition 2* and *Tekken 2*



Sega Chairman Hayao Nakayama (far left, center in shot), made a rare appearance. Sega's Virtua Fighter 3 peripheral proved popular, as did an early version (80%) of *Fighting Vipers* (above) and its arcade-quality joystick



With *Mortal Kombat*, Capcom's kidly range of arks (above) got NG's vote



According to Suzuki, the main difficulty AM2 is having with the new character is his movement. Evidently, because of Takarashi's immense size, he looks ridiculous when squaring off against other fighters. To compensate, AM2 is giving him traditional Sumo moves, such as the ability to ring out the opposition with his sheer bulk. However, AM2 is currently redesigning the character, since his current height (stretching toward 7') exceeds even the massive Jeffy, and it is unclear how fat he should be. (Apparently, if he has about 4" of fat surrounding his stomach, any beating he takes will not appear to have significant impact on him).

In pursuit of advanced gameplay, VF3 is aiming for bouts to incorporate more strategic options than in previous VF games. From what Suzuki says, it appears that each blow will be affected by all previous hits. So, if a player adopts a simple strategy of always

looking the opponent, the game will compensate for this repetition by making subsequent kicks less powerful.

Aiming for specific parts of the body will also affect the amount of damage scored (although Next Generation studios to think

what particular body parts will be regarded as the most sensitive spots on either female or male characters).

The difference between each character's fighting technique is also likely to be exaggerated, and fights will be less linear than current versions, with contestants using the entire arena space.

Virtua Kids, the VF2-derived brawler featuring super-deformed fighters (child-like characters with enlarged heads) was also present. The coin-op conversion was 100% faithful — unsurprising considering the original was developed for Sega's Saturn-based STV coin-op technology.

Virtua Cop 2 was also on display, and appears to be nearly arcade-perfect, as was the conversion of VCL. In a similar plan of attack to Saturn *Virtua Cop*, Sega plans to implement either bonus stages or training stages to add longevity to the home version.

From third-party developers, Climax's 3D arcade adventure, *Dark Savor*, probably made the biggest impact. Also on display was Shiner/Asasushi Teremaru, an attractive Shnoob-type game with dark but impressive 3D backgrounds.

Demonstrating Sega's enthusiasm for multimedia, Saturn's Net Link modem was introduced at the show. Running at 34.4 K and costing \$54,800 (\$199 in the U.S.), the modem comes bundled with connection software, a Net browser, and a connection to Nifty-Serve (a Japanese net server similar to America OnLine). Also introduced were Net accessories — a disk drive, keyboard, and a media card which acts as an interface for games to be played over the Net.

Sega also introduced its XBand online service, accessible via the Internet or Nifty-Serve. From here games will be able to select one of six network Sega games (*VF Remix*, *Sega Rally*, *Daytona USA*, *World Sens Baseball*, *Virtua On*, and *Bombardier*). Whether it will be possible to actually download games, or whether the site is simply restricted to network play will become clearer later in the year.

With the two other big guns in videogaming not making an immediate entry into the online game market, Sega's Net Link could well gain a much-needed foothold in Saturn's continued battle against PlayStation, and now also Nintendo 64.

Crib

Stuff every gamer should know. This month, Nintendo's skeleton in the closet.

No. 3 Virtual Boy

So what is it? Good question. It's kind of a cross between a submarine's periscope, a pair of infrared night goggles, and the worst game you ever played.

Sounds bad. Oh, yeah. And at its original price of \$179 it wasn't cheap, either.

So why did Nintendo make such a mistake? Well, if you believe the rumors, what happened was this: You remember Nintendo's Game & Watch handhelds?

Um, yes. And the Game Boy?

Of course. Well, the man responsible for these two success stories is a guy called Gunpei Yokoi. Virtual Boy is another of his inventions.

I don't get it. How does that explain anything? Because of Mr. Yokoi's previous successes, so one at Nintendo HQ doubted that lightning would strike a third time. (And perhaps more importantly, no one had the courage to tell the master that his latest invention sucked.)

So were there ever any good games for Virtual Boy? No, of course not. A couple of the discs are fairly solid, but they might as well be Game Boy games. Even the best "3D effect" can't enhance gameplay — ultimately it's just a gimmick. Has Nintendo learned from its mistake? Let's hope so.



種類しかない。



Companies showing off home virtual reality, such as Takara, revealed technology akin to watching a television with a silly looking helmet on. No thanks

The issues affecting the way games are made

Generator

How a little game called *Doom* may have changed the business world forever

With the rising interest in the Internet, there is increasing speculation that online gaming will be the next big wave in games. So far, development has concentrated in two areas: the first is online distribution of games; the second is multiplayer gaming. We'll cover multiplayer gaming next month.

Online distribution of games enables game developers to "disintermediate" the distribution channel and deliver product directly to the consumer. This is a fancy term for cutting out the middle man, and the most readily available examples are Id's *Doom* and Genesis games available on the SegaChannel.

Id was very successful in reaching a huge market with *Doom* using online distribution over the Internet. First, *Doom* offered a new level of user experience (in terms of its 3D look) that compelled users to want the software. Second, Id made it easy for users to get their hands on it by posting the binaries on many sites throughout the Net. Almost overnight, this created a huge installed base of the demos, a strong brand name, and instant product feedback for Id.

Interestingly, the power of this approach isn't limited to gaming — one year later, Netscape used a similar scheme to capture a large share of the Internet browser market. Both of these companies use online distribution to capture the controlling anchor point in their business. In Id's case, it's the full version of the game that can be bought via telemarketing and retail. In Netscape's case, it's the server software that companies buy to place themselves on the World Wide Web.

The term "Doomonomics" has been used to describe this business model, which now serves as the de facto model for selling software on the Internet because it's currently the fastest way to build an installed base and sales. Online distribution works for many reasons: one, potential users (PC owners) include big numbers who already have access to the Net; and two, no extra costs are necessary to end-users beyond their installed modem.

By contrast, in order to provide software via the SegaChannel, cable companies have to buy SegaChannel game adapters (each costing around \$175) up front. This creates some inventory risk — because they actually have to manufacture anything, there's a risk that they'll end up being stuck with thousands of unsold boxes — and slows down how quickly the technology could be offered to users. Also, the users have to pay an extra monthly fee beyond that of getting wired for cable, even in addition to whatever monthly fees they already pay. This "show-the-metal-box" business model has had a predictably slower adoption rate.

The contrast between the success of these two models is that "Doomonomics" enables the whole market to be attacked quickly and incurs no inventory risk on the part of the company producing the product.

It's easy to see how "Doomonomics" will be the business model for the Internet.

The next step is to further remove inventory risk and build a market faster is to move the entire software product — not just a level or demo version — electronically from developer to consumer. For this to happen, bullet-proof network security and higher bandwidth connections need to be implemented. Security is necessary both to protect the consumer so no one can "listen in" and gain access to credit card or account numbers, and on the company's end so that no one can access the product without payment. This kind of bullet-proof system will require a network-wide application from the developer out to the user, and currently there is a great deal of work going into finding a robust, 99.9% secure solution.

Of more interest to gamers, however, are the means of delivering higher bandwidth. Higher bandwidth is clearly needed because consumers will not want to wait hours to download new sequels or levels.

There have been many announcements about new bandwidth technology like cable modems and XDSL technology. The cable industry, naturally, is pushing cable-modems, and they

initially showed some promise since they allowed for 10 MB per second connections using the current cable infrastructure. The cable modem would attach to your PC and take the place of your modem card. However, recent tests of cable modems have indicated that the whole cable plant and wiring acts like a huge antenna and generates too much electromagnetic interference. These technology problems have markedly slowed down the rollout of cable-modems to the home.

The phone companies are pushing XDSL technologies. XDSL covers three different kinds of technology (ADSL, HDSL, VDSL), but to the user, XDSL is nothing more than a new modem card for his or her PC, and in spite of technical hurdles, XDSL chips are starting to trickle out.

Once gamers get all this bandwidth, we'll have the communications capability to download ridiculously large sequels and adventures. With reduced inventory costs, developers and publishers should also have higher profit margins and possibly bigger marketing budgets. Coupled with better graphics, it will open up the era of multiperson virtual world adventures where sections of the virtual world can be pagged off of the Internet as we explore them.

It's easy to see how "Doomonomics" will be the business model for the Net

by **George Zachary**

George Zachary, who, when working with Silicon Graphics, was interviewed in *NO. 14*, is now a partner at their Boulder, Colorado, a technology venture capital firm, to conduct due diligence by sending e-mail to him at gzachary@rock.com.



"New Amiga" prepares to kill Mac/PC

Is this really the computer the Mac "should have been?" Many game developers think so

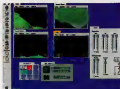
A new high-spec computer is being hailed as a 1990's version of the 1980's favorite Amiga. Incorporating two PowerPC chips running in parallel, built-in networking protocols, MIDI, and industry-standard expansion slots, the workstation is increasingly being seen by some industry speculators as the future of modern computing.

Created by ex-Apple employee, Jean-Louis Gassée, the BeBox has already been making waves with its potential for game development. A flight sim featuring realistic Gouraud-shaded landscapes and aircraft, and a 3D Descend-style game are already being touted as early releases. Both games take full advantage of the BeBox's hardware (two built-in joystick ports and four serial ones) and operating system (multithreading, preemptive multitasking with built-in networking) — features which gave the Amiga such a loyal following.

Such versatility and hardware power (the basic set-up incorporates two PowerPC 601 chips running at 66 MHz, with 16 MB RAM and SVGA video) makes it possible to launch the same game twice and play against a friend on the same BeBox, using just one screen, via its built-in networking. To prevent two game windows overlapping each can be resized in real-time, via standard Mac-like drag tools, while the game continues to play in the background.



Jean-Louis Gassée, founder of Be, left Apple disaffected with the company's treatment of founder Steve Jobs



The BeBox has been hailed as the computer that Apple's Mac should have evolved into. Multiplayer games can be played across the BeBox's internal network, on the same screen.

Whether the BeBox impresses consumers as much as it has some industry insiders remains to be seen. Certainly Gassée's sales policy doesn't particularly inspire confidence: "Before we let you use the BeBox, we believe you must have some aptitude toward programming — the standard language is C++," he warns. "Also, you must have an Internet connection and at least \$2,500 for a basic-spec machine," he told Next Generation.

Nevertheless, with Java and VRML being added to the list of features as standard, the BeBox, if successful, could represent a minor threat to the vast PC market. And although BeBox is still in need of that one elusive killer app, with 1,500 registered developers, it could easily find itself as big as, if not bigger than, the Amiga was during the '80's computer boom.

Data

Nintendo of America's marketing budget for Nintendo 64 in 1994: **\$50 million**
Marketing cost per machine on sale: **\$100**

According to Forrester, Microsoft: World's share of the worldwide word processing market, first quarter 1994: **80%**

Average total cost of raising an average teenager: **\$36,000**

Average total cost of raising a teenager with a "stylish social life": **\$93,000**

Number of photos taken each year, worldwide: **60 billion**

Number of Apple Macintosh computers in use around the world: **19 million**

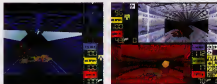
Percentage of Internet users who are male: **85%**

Percentage of males who admit to having experimented with cross dressing: **25%**

Number of Game Boy's sold worldwide: **48 million**

Estimated number of people (worldwide) likely to be using the Internet by the year 2000: **500 million**

Most played CD in the NC offices throughout the production of issue 21: **Together Alone and Woodface** by Crowded House



Although basic in terms of graphics, this Descend-style game (above) indicates the BeBox hardware's potential and also its ability to supply multiplayer gaming experience. With two high-end PowerPC chips running in parallel, the BeBox's power leaves modern Macs and PCs standing

Arcadia

All the latest arcade and coin-op news

Arcade Games Down 40% in Five Years

In the world of coin-op video, the hardest thing to get is accurate, reliable sales numbers. They're harder to get than gameplay tips. They're even harder to uncover than scoops on the new characters in *Mortal Kombat 4*. But this month, *Arcadia* readers are going to get some vital statistics. Enjoy, because they won't come your way again for quite a while!

During the summer of 1996, talk by videogame factory insiders is that arcade profits are reportedly down 40% from 1990 levels. That is, about 90,000 units have been sold, which means about \$150 million net profit to the factories. (Maybe the dollar figure should really be a bit higher, since a lot of the units sold have been big, expensive deluxe games like *Daytona USA* and *Alpine Racer*.) For comparison purposes, in 1990 the U.S. market took around 150,000 new coin-ops at a price tag of about \$290 million paid to game factories.

The arcade fall-off in the past few years has been sharp and dramatic. Lots of arguments are going around about why this is happening, but the basic reason is starkly clear: competition from home machines such as Saturn, PlayStation, and the PC. As this column has reported before, videogame factories are basically in competition with themselves. The best moment to release an arcade game to the home market — at least in terms of peak player demand — is precisely the time when players are pumping the most quarters into the coin-op version. But the shorter the "window" between arcade and home release, the more reluctant arcade owners are to buy the expensive arcade game. Talk about killing the goose that lays the golden eggs!

Meantime, the quality gap between home and arcade products has been closing (except, again, for large sims like *Daytona* or *Alpine Racer*), major arcade chains say '96 earnings are down as little as 7% or as much as 17% from '95 (either way, it's a big dip), and arcades are moaning about there being "Nothing hot to buy right now."

But the real problem isn't a lack of high-quality games (some of the arcade games out there right now are sensational). The real problem is a glaring lack of "product difference" between what players are getting in the arcade, and what they can get at home. Good games are still selling briskly for Saturn and PlayStation, after all. Players haven't lost interest in the basic product — they've just changed their choice of where they want to play.

Nevertheless, arcade games, sufficiently different from home videogames, can and do make money. To drive this point home, take a look at the year-end statements from Japan's leading factories. During fiscal 1995-1996, Sega and Namco made up for losses in the 16-bit home video market with robust growth in coin-op game sales and arcade operations revenues. Why? Mostly because of advanced computer graphics and custom cabinets of games like *Daytona* and *Alpine Racer*, that's why!

Sega Previews

Modern linked multiplayer videogames are "definitely planned" for Sega GameWorks locations, according to company insiders. Over the next five years, the factory hopes to open anything up to 100 heavily themed arcades in the U.S., with design input from Steven Spielberg. Sega may also make its modern technology available to other (non-Sega) arcades...

Meanwhile, cabinet configuration for the U.S. version of *Virtua Fighter 3* is still in development; the factory is considering a sort of "mini-deluxe" with a larger-than-normal screen which would still retain some space economy aspects (many arcades have limited space, but still desire all the latest machines) closer to that of a standard video upright. As previously reported in *Arcadia*, VF3 uses Sega's new Model 3 hardware, which delivers more than one million texture-mapped polygons per second. Pretty hot stuff.

Lastly, by spring '97, Sega will release its first arcade driving game (most likely *Daytona USA 2*) using Model 3. We can't wait.



Up and Coming Coin-ops

Xevious 3D/G — Namco

For whatever reason (it could be a trend or a rut), the industry continues to drag from the basement all manner of classics to "rework."

This means games we've all played before. Like *Xevious 3D/G* for the System 11 board, an overhead shooter with new 3D graphics, and three kinds of weapons.



Wavesark — Konami

One of Konami's first outdoor simulators, *Wavesark* was shown at ACME in Orlando and stood out as a fast, polygon-based 3D jetski racing game. Race through tunnels, over jumps, and bump off opponents, all the while just trying to stay on. Due later this summer.

Aqua Jet — Namco

Namco, known for its supreme arcade simulators like *Alpine Racer*, is also working on its own jetski coin-op. Based on the Super 22 System, this one-player game is a race against time in which players can jump off waves and down waterfalls. Due in early October.

Last Bronx — Sega

This AM3 fighter is still in the shadows of VF3, yet is certain to put VF2 to shame, with tough characters, weapons, interactive backgrounds, and intuitive control.



By Marcus Webb
 Marcus Webb is the editor-in-chief of *RePlay* magazine, the US leading trade amusement magazine



F1 Challenge



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Customizable player settings for greater control of your car's performance including mid-race pit row changes.



"This new racing sim sets the pace for the rest of the field.. The game's 3-D graphics match or surpass Sega's previous racing titles..."

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movers & shakers
The business news that affects the games you play

NINTENDO OPENS DDORS TO DEALS

NEWSLINE: Nintendo and Sega have been working on an agreement in which the Nintendo 64's technology will be used to power coin-op arcade games. Nintendo is hoping to strike up a "synergy" similar to that enjoyed by Sony's relationship with Namco, in which arcade hits are brought relatively painlessly onto a home format. Meantime, Microsoft, Nintendo, and Namco Research have formed a joint venture to provide Japanese consumers with an "innovative information service including infotainment," via the PC. Nintendo will provide entertainment content which will be piped direct into Japanese homes via satellite.

BOTTOMLINE: Nintendo has been busy forming joint ventures to both leverage its current properties, and launch it into potentially vital markets. The company is famously reticent about dabbling in areas other than strict game development and deals with specialized partners is increasingly becoming a Nintendo strategy.

LEGO BUILDS GAME BLOCK

NEWSLINE: Lego, the world renowned maker of children's building blocks, is set to enter the videogame market. The Danish company is planning to invest nearly \$2 million in development with the emphasis being placed firmly on games which feature elements of the famous brick-based ships, houses, and scenes.

BOTTOMLINE: Lego, among a bevy of other toy manufacturers, is frightened to death of the PC and console markets. Many are rushing to play catch-up although one wonders why companies with such financial and distribution muscle didn't act sooner.

GT BAGS FORMGEN

NEWSLINE: GT Interactive has been on the acquisition trail, picking up FormGen, the original publisher of Duke Nukem 3D, and WizardWorks, a publisher of budget games.

BOTTOMLINE: GT has been forced to explore deeper into the industry as a result of the ever-growing confidence of Id Software.

Now that Id publishes itself in the U.S., GT can no longer rely on the *Dooms* or *Quakes* of this world and must instead prepare for a future with other partners. FormGen should serve them well in this role.

MATSUSHITA COUGHS UP

NEWSLINE: Matsushita is considering how to approach the thorny problem of servicing third-party developers following the closure of its deal with The 3DO Company. 3DO recently received the last \$40 million from its \$100 million sale of M2 to Matsushita late last year. In the interim, 3DO has been finishing hardware engineering, and dealing directly with third-party developers.

BOTTOMLINE: Now that The 3DO Company has cleared its contractual obligations, Matsushita must consider its options. Developing for M2 has not exactly been on the top of many agendas in the industry, and there's little doubt that Matsushita's best short-term recipe for continued progress would be to re-hire 3DO to work with U.S. third parties. Indeed, despite M2's difficulties, reports from developers concerning The 3DO Company's involvement have been positive.

Sooner or later, however, Matsushita will have to establish its own presence and infrastructure within the U.S. Hence a decision to stay with The 3DO Company would suggest that Matsushita is in no real rush, and that an M2 hardware launch is still not likely any time soon.

SONY'S EBULLIENT SALES BOOM

NEWSLINE: Sony has released official figures of hardware and software sales following E3's price-drop to \$199. The company is claiming "three-fold" increases in sales.

BOTTOMLINE: Sony is still claiming the high ground over Saturn with talk of sales now at a four-to-one ratio. A spokesperson for Electronics Boutique oiled that the "PlayStation is continuing its dominance over Saturn." More to the point, the \$199 price-point has proven to be an attractive pull to consumers who do not normally invest in hardware during the summer months.

JAPANESE GAMERS LOSE CONTROL

NEWSLINE: Apparently, Japanese stores are running extremely short on the extra, brightly colored joypads sold separately from the Nintendo 64. This is despite the fact that none of the games available for the N64 at the time of going to press require an extra joystick...

BOTTOMLINE: Think about this for a moment. Nintendo can't sell enough of a product which no one actually needs.



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Play games on the Internet and win big prizes

And now for something completely different. There's a new breed of games out there, games that are more like TV game shows than computer games. So if you ever watched "Jeopardy" and thought, "I could have won that car," now you'll get your chance to give it a shot — along with thousands, if not millions of other over-educated cyberspace citizens.

The mother of them all maybe a company called Yoyodyne (www.yoyo.com), an outfit that took its name from the evil Red Lectroids from the cult movie *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across the 8th Dimension*, (required watching for any would-be computer geek). The good news is that anyone, even users who compose their XBand e-mail with joypads, can play Yoyodyne's games because they are all played by e-mail.

Yoyodyne sponsors online trivia games through its mail server. Sign up for a Yoyodyne game and you'll be put on an e-mail list. Every week or so, trivia questions will be sent to you on behalf of a corporate sponsor, much in the same way TV game shows used to be sponsored by a company or product (like Geritol) and the game show "21" which was scandalized by Herb Stempel and Columbia Professor Charles Van Doren). One of Yoyodyne's latest contests is sponsored by Arid Extra Dry, and involves kissing in the movies — it's all part of Arid's "Get a little closer" campaign. You'll get questions, followed by hints, which might be linked to Arid's web site, or even in-store product displays. You can answer the questions by e-mail, and Yoyodyne automatically checks your answers and keeps track of your score; you'll receive a score update after each round. So what's the reward? Yoyodyne's contests can win you everything from t-shirts to a trip for two to the Caribbean.

Riddler has a different approach. Riddler (www.riddler.com) uses the dope web designers of New York City's Silicon Alley to put together one of the most cutting-edge web sites you'll find. It features tasteful graphics which won't clog your 28.8K bps modem (don't tell me you're using anything slower), and some of the most extensive uses of Java to date. In case you've been stuck on the Freeman ranch, or been hanging out with the Unabomber (should Montana be the official anti-technology state?), Java is a programming language designed to be platform independent (it runs on a Mac or PC, for example) and functions in conjunction with your web browser, like Netscape's Navigator 2.0 or Microsoft's Internet Explorer 3.0.

Riddler's Java games are multiplayer — you end up to three other opponents can work on a crossword puzzle simultaneously, for instance —

and Riddler's riddles make sure that none of the puzzles are particularly easy. In fact, according to Riddler's Greg Stuart, they can be downright impossible for mere mortals. But not all of Riddler's games are technically demanding, and much of the content doesn't require Java.

Riddler's advertisers sponsor the games with prizes like a spanking new Toyota RAV 4 Sports Utility vehicle (one has already been won recently by an enterprising gamer).

Sandbox comes at it from a different angle. If Riddler is like the online newspaper puzzle page, Sandbox (www.sandbox.net) is more like an online TV game show. Its latest offering is the Court of Last Resort, a sort of "People's Court" in cyberspace. Two "Netizens" agree to submit their dispute to a cyberjury after presenting their cases. After hearing the evidence for both sides (and visiting the sponsors' web pages for additional information) the audience (that's you) votes on which way the decision should go. The plaintiff and defendant then receive the verdict, along with prizes for competing, portioned on the share of favorable votes the parties received.

Like Riddler, Sandbox has its own internal currency, Sand Dollars, to be spent at various pursuits. The game *Road Trip* to the College World Series, for example, takes you on a virtual trip along with actual people making the trip to the College World Series. Visiting sponsor sites might net you shortcuts or add to your inventory — you can pick up items like a "virtual radar detector" for use in the contest, enabling you to "speed" and the game keeps track of everything on the Sandbox server. Of course, real prizes are offered to the winner.

The good news is that although these games will soon seem as antiquated as those old TV gameshows, the fact is that they've got more entrepreneurs thinking of ways to get online corporate sponsorship. And that buys a rosy future. Remember, online gaming is unlikely to be a flat "all-you-can-eat" rate since gamers will stay on all day, and an hourly rate will deter a large number of potential users. So the big online gaming networks of the future are looking for viable alternatives.

Television is "free" because advertising pays for the content. (Of course, you pay for the advertising through the purchase price. But that's another story.) And these early pioneers are proving that the same model can work for online gaming. So how about a multiplayer Quake game sponsored by Smith & Wesson? It's coming. And, it's gonna be cheap.

Besides, you always wanted that Jeep. Now use your cybersmarts to win it.

Gaming on the Internet

SO
RIDDLING

by Bernard Yee

Bernard Yee writes regularly for PC Gamer, PC Magazine, and has authored several books on gaming. Email him at bernard@yepine.com



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breaking

top Ten

With the All Time Top 100 on everyone's mind, we're all gone chart crazy this month. Here are some more:

The five most overrated games of all time:

1. *Myst* Inane puzzles but lovely graphics.
2. *Rebel Assault* Shame on you LucasArts!
3. *Mortal Kombat* "Dooh! Look at all the blood!" Snee
4. *Killer Instinct* Rendered? Yes. Combo? Yes. Ouf? Yes
5. *Seventh Guest* It's like a bad movie, only more so

The five most bizarre game concepts of all time:

1. *Alvin Golf* Battle rings but lovely graphics.
2. *Tennis RPG* It's an RPG. It's tennis. Go figure
3. *Lunar Golf* Golf on the moon. Hell — why not?
4. *Burger Time* All the thrills of working in McDonald's
5. *ChWer* Torture prisoners with a light gun!

Seven movie games you'll never see:

1. *Citizen Kane* It's one big nine cart level, ride "Rose Bud" throwing newspapers (Paperboy style) and dodging Hearsts
2. *My Left Foot* You have to control this fast-paced Doom-style shooter using your toes
3. *Namer vs. Namer* Based on Capcom's SF2 engine
4. *Roger and Me* You play Roger Smith, based on the Rampage engine and set in Flint, MI
5. *It's a Wonderful Life* Tum Bedford Falls into hell on earth in this first-person shooter. Earn bonus points by not killing Santa
6. *THX 1138* It's just like *Rebel Assault*. Except that everything — everything — is white
7. *1984* Can you guide the rat through the maze to Winston Smith's face?

The six things every 16-bit side-scroller should include:

1. Mine cart level On wheels!
2. Undersnow level Moving slightly slowly!
3. Ice Level! Slippery!
4. "Asplode" You've either got it or you haven't!
5. A marketing budget (Bigger than the development budget)
6. Blast Processing! It worked for Sonic, right?

The five things every 32-bit game could do without:

1. Intro sequences Who cares? No, really. Who cares?
2. "Wacky" mascots This isn't 1991 any more
3. CD soundtracks How about some interactive music?
4. Morphing logos Spend more time on the game please
5. The word "cyber" And we mean anywhere
6. Load times Because we know that half of it is just more morphing logos...

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in shrouds of darkness,

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breaking

Datebook

August

Siggraph blends interactive media with digital entertainment, and has a hand in all of the newest emerging technologies of 1996. Open to the public, this event will be held from Tuesday through Thursday, August 6-8, in New Orleans, LA. **Digital Bayou** will be the interactive games center and will include spotlight games such as *Virtual Playspace*, *Hoverball*, *Naotic Challenge*, *Digital Dandelion*, *Cypress Adventure*, and *Bayou Sauvage*. Call or write: Siggraph 96 Exhibition Management Hall-Erickson, Inc. 150 Burlington Avenue Clarendon Hills, Illinois 60514 USA, 1.708.850.7779, 1.708.850.7843 fax, haleric@siggraph.org.

The biggy in Mac expos is coming your way. **Macworld Expo** will be held in Boston Wednesday through Saturday, August 7-10, at the World Trade Center Boston and Bayside Expo Center. This expo highlights the latest software and hardware developments for the Macintosh, new development kits, Internet related info, conferences, computer graphics, animation, and games. Not open to the public. Register on-site at either the World Trade Center or the Bayside Expo Center. Fax complete registration info to (617) 440-0363.

September

AMOA, the **Amusement and Music Operators Association**, will hold its annual event this year from Thursday to Saturday, September 26 to 28 in the Dallas Convention Center, Dallas, Texas. This event is not open to the public, but will show the newest arcade games, redemption games, virtual reality games, pinball machines, jukeboxes, etc. to the industry. For more information please contact Fred Newton at AMOA, (312) 245-1021; or e-mail amoa@sba.com.

October

The **7th Annual Fun Expo**, known as the layman's "fun center show" because of its focus on small- to medium-sized Family Entertainment Centers and Location-Based Entertainment Centers, will be held at the Sands Expo and Convention, Las Vegas, Nevada from October 9 to 12. Open to trade only, not to the public. There will be more than 1,000 booths, amusement equipment, virtual reality equipment, arcade and redemption games, motion simulators, and more than 40 seminars on running FECs, and LBECs. Call Rich Regan for booth information or Barley Beeken for any other questions about hotels (Treasure Islands, Mirage, and Harrahs) or attending at (914) 993-9200, or FAX at (914) 993-9210; or check out their web site at funexpo@aol.com.

November

IAPPA, the **International Association of Amusements and Attractions**, is like a big arcade show except for the simulators, rides, and amusement attractions, for which it's famous. Closed to the public, it's held from November 20 to the 23 in New Orleans, LA, at the New Orleans Convention Center. Call 1 (703) 836-4800 for more info.

SHOW ORGANIZERS: If your show isn't listed here, well, that's because you haven't told us about it. Call (415) 468-4684, FAX information to (415) 468-4685, or send details to DATEBOOK.

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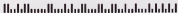
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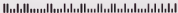
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The best games of all time? *Ranked?* If truth be told, this is the story everyone told us not to do. So what choice did we have?



Everyone loves lists. At *Next Generation*, however, we're sick of seeing top 10 or top 100 lists that seem helplessly bogged down in short-term hysteria or dewey-eyed nostalgia. We don't want to see a list that is really the top 100 games "we liked in the arcade way back when," or "that sold a million copies," or—even more worrying—are "by compromise that paid for advertising in this issue." We want to know the real top 100 best video and computer games. So we decided to do it ourselves.

An extremely stringent criteria was established. First, in order to make the list, the game had to be one that we would still play today, so nostalgia-tinged relics like *Mr. Do's Wild Ride* were lost immediately.

Second, while historical significance is undoubtedly important, the "100 most influential games of all time" is a different list entirely, so historical significance didn't get a game included all by itself.

Third, we have not equivocated by dividing the top 100 into the top 10 per system or per genre. That, to us, is the coward's way out. We have, however, cheated in one small way, by grouping series of games under one heading, if the games in the series were similar. This prevented series like *Mario*, *Doom*, or *Final Fantasy* from monopolizing the list.

Fourth, for a game to be considered, it had to be either released at the time of publication, or we had to have access to a final version. This, unfortunately, kept likely candidates like *Diablo* from the list. Finally, for multiplatform games, we listed the platform on which we consider the game to be best. The glitchy Saturn version of *Daytona USA* isn't listed (its arcade version is), but the arcade-perfect PlayStation version of *Joust* is. For games that were available for a variety of personal computers, like the

Apple II, Commodore 64, and Amiga, we used the designation "PCs," if it just says PC, it refers to MS-DOS-based machines.

We started with a list of more than 500 games, and through many hours of sometimes exceptionally heated (and profane) discussion at the *Next Generation* offices, we narrowed it down to 150, which is where things started to get tough. Remarkably, culling the last 50 took only eight hours of debate. (And for the record, Gaudiel was number 101.)

Undoubtedly, most readers will find favorite games left off the list, wonder at the inclusion of games they despise, or want to take us to task for the ranking of individual games. We welcome discussion of our choices, and have set up a special forum at *Next Generation Online* (<http://www.next-generation.com/>) specifically for discussion of this article. There is also a polling place where votes will be taken for your favorite games, and the results will be tallied and released online.

There are definitely some surprises on the list. Almost no shooters made the final cut, and there isn't a *Final Fight*-style game here, either (this reflects our own bias toward genres that require thought above twitch skills). And some people will undoubtedly say that there are too many Infocom text adventures, and not enough PC sims or puzzle games.

Nonetheless, we proudly stand by each of our choices.

100 *Trinity* Released: 1966

Platform: PC

Publisher: Infocom

What's the game: A text adventure by Brian Moriarty, with a science-fantasy setting, in which you must prevent a nuclear war by making sure the *Trinity* project (the first atom bomb test) never occurs.

What's the big deal: *Trinity* takes the same types of serious themes of *A Mind Forever Voyaging*, and adds to them a heavy dose of mythology and fantasy. From a

package tour to London, players end up in Japan (in time to witness The Bomb dropping on a group of school children), in a trifle that is a *Klein Jar*, and taking a trip across the river Styx. Add to this a realistic end-game and this is not only one of the most socially and politically powerful games experiences ever created, but also a landscape upon which puzzles of trademark Infocom quality can appear. Even the final packaging (complete with plans for an origami crane) stands out from the pack.

A game that takes such a practical tack when addressing the concept of nuclear war (as opposed to the proliferation of "strategic air commands" rip-offs) was, at the time of release, a very risky endeavor (it being the Jingoistic Reagan '80s) and we understand that the game was released despite the strenuous objections of Infocom's marketing department.

Memorable moments:
Nanopolizing the Gnomes.



It fits in 128 K of RAM and has no graphics, but it's still far more immersive than *Myst*

99 *NBA Jam* (series) Released: 1993-1996

Platform: Arcade, multi

Publisher: Midway, Acclaim

What's the game: Four-person, arcade-style, two-on-two basketball with crazy, unrealistic moves and many hidden goodies.

What's the big deal: Despite it

having been flogged to death by Acclaim at home and now in the arcade, NBA Jam is still a terrific game, especially in the arcade with four players. Many of its innovations are now cliché, but it remains one of the best arcade machines around. It's a great provider of action without shooting or fighting.

Memorable moments: Ad Rock ("on fire") executing a flaming dunk over Bill Clinton.



NBA Jam may be getting a bit long in the tooth, but it's still great fun.

98 R-Type

Released: 1987
Platform: Arcade,
TurboGrafx-16

Galaga

Released: 1981
Platform: Arcade
Publisher: Namco

What's the game: It's basically Galaxians (which was basically Space Invaders) but with a few key enhancements. The ships attack in formation, line up in formation, and some require multiple shots to kill. Plus, gamers' ships can be captured, then rescued.

What's the big deal: Sure, Space Invaders is awesome for its simplicity, but when players want some skill and strategy with their shooting (not to mention improved color graphics), Galaga delivers. The ability to rescue a captured ship and gain two

shots at once was an awesome innovation, plus it keeps track of your shooting percentage.

Memorable moments: 100% shooting percentage! (In our dreams.)



Thanks to Namco Museum, Galaga is now playable in all its original arcade glory on Sony's PlayStation

Publisher: IREM
What's the game: Frantic side-scrolling shooter, with powerups that manifest themselves as odd one-of-a-kind ship.



R-Type's stunning art direction and great vector blend superiority

What's the big deal: The graphics were revolutionary for their time, and still stand up well today. Sure, we've seen 1,000 side-scrolling shooters since, but few match its design innovations (Weapon came close), enemies, and, well, big huge bosses. **Memorable moments:** Discovering that the little ball can be a shield or a weapon.



97 Space Invaders

Released: 1978
Platform: Arcade
Publisher: Taito

What's the game: Row after row of aliens move back and forth across the screen, dropping bombs on you. At the bottom of the screen, players shoot back, hiding behind destructible shields. **What's the big deal:** In addition to being many gamers' first arcade experience, Space Invaders, as the first of its genre, provides an elegance and simplicity not found in later games like Phoenix. There are enemies, and there is you.

When we want an exceptionally simple shooter, there is nothing better. Space Invaders is "twitch" gaming. **Memorable moments:** The arcade update that provided a neat "space city" in the background; also, missing the one last alien so many times it starts cutting the tops off of your aliens.

95 Strike (series)

Released: 1992-1996
Platform: Genesis, Super NES,
PlayStation

Publisher: EA
What's the game: Isometric-view helicopter action-arcade game in four installments: Desert, Jungle, Urban, and Soviet.

What's the big deal: Rarely has a game series had such an on-target blend of action, strategy, and scenery (the original Desert Strike hilariously re-created much of Desert Storm). Add to this the excellent graphic tile-sets and a helicopter that controls just the way it should, and the makings of a dynasty are complete.

Each game is excellent in its own right, yet Jungle Strike and Urban Strike each manage to improve the underlying game, not just give gamers more of the same (we'll cast a blind eye on the worthless foot missions of Urban Strike).

Memorable moments: Taking out enemy foot soldiers with Hellfire missiles when, frankly, a simple bullet could do the job just fine.

94 Rave Racer

Released: 1995
Platform: Arcade
Publisher: Namco

What's the game: (We're talking about the eight-way multiplayer link-up version, of course.) This is Ridge Racer (indy-style racing over a street course) with a new track and different music.

What's the big deal: It could never be a classic home game, but in the arcade, with a force-feedback steering wheel, loud speakers, a huge monitor, and a link to up to seven other units, Rave Racer truly kicks ass.

Memorable moments: Discovering "the shortcut" and beating everyone else.



The key to Rave Racer's brilliance is in the linked mode

93 Burning Force

Released: 1991
Platform: Genesis
Publisher: Namco
What's the game: A Space Harrier style, forward-scrolling shooter. **What's the big deal:** Considered short in the 32-bit days, this 2D level gem is still about twice as long as your average 32-bit game.

What earns Burning Force its place on this list is level design. The fact that no enemies are repeated from level to level, and the stunning design of the bosses. Never a hit commercially, BFC can be found at garage sales. **Memorable moments:** The little girl who points out the vulnerable areas of the bosses.

92 Hard Hat Mac

Platform: PC
Publisher: EA
What's the game: One of the very first platform games.

What's the big deal: In the early '90s, when many videogame conventions were still being worked out, Electronic Arts took on a surprising number of platform game challenges, and nailed them all in one game. Hard Hat Mac has everything: moving platforms, collapsing bridges, exploding jumps, and falling obstacles. A few attempts at establishing the genre had come before, but they hadn't succeeded, and if you owned a CD, chances are you had a copy. **Memorable moments:** Jumping between the crushing plates of level 3's die mold.

91 Resident Evil

Released: 1996
Platform: PlayStation
Publisher: Capcom

What's the game: A first-person, 3D, polygon-based graphic adventure set in a zombie-infested mansion (with pre-rendered

backgrounds). Equal parts of brains and reflexes are required to uncover the mansion's dark secret and to make it out alive. **What's the big deal:** Resident Evil successfully refines the genre which started with Inframed's Alone in the Dark, and has quickly become the best-selling PlayStation game in the U.S. (stealing the crown from NFL Gameday). Excellent use of music and sound effects coupled with a deep, compelling story combine to create a horror movie atmosphere that manages to make the player a participant, not just a spectator. The game's single glaring fault is the atrociously bad voice actors used for the characters.

Memorable moments: The spine tingling, heart-pumping, sweat-inducing sensation that being chased down the halls of a mansion by blood-thirsty Hell hounds tends to create.



Resident Evil looks and plays like an action-adventure game should

90 Xevious
Released: 1992
Platform: Arcade
Publisher: Namco

What's the game: Vertically scrolling shooter, with two planes of combat (air and ground), so players bomb ground targets while shooting aerial enemies. **What's the big deal:** This is an unbelievably complete game, and it delivers a fantastic feeling of intense action when played.



In Xevious, if it moves, shoot it. And if it doesn't move, bomb it.

There are several different types of flying enemies, the ground targets are varied, and facing the massive mobotship should cause an adrenaline rush in the most hardened gamers. The art direction is impeccable (this was the first game to use rendered graphics), the level design is intelligent, and there are enough skill shots (like hitting between two ground targets and blowing them both up) to keep you coming back.

One of Namco's proudest moments to date.

Memorable moments: Hey look, that cute little black ball just turned into... a herring missile!

89 Summer Games, Winter Games, and California Games
Released: 1983

Platform: multiple
Publisher: Epyx
What's the game: Timing-heavy arcade versions of Olympic and nonmajor-league sports (skate shooting, diving, surfing, bob sliding, etc.). **What's the big deal:** Sure, they had great graphics for their time (although they seem dated now), but the Epyx games are all about two things: First, playing against your friends (they all had multiplayer modes); Second — and more important — control. Every game has a level of control that has yet to be equalled. Getting a good score or time



Epyx's Winter Games features extremely innovative gameplay

thus depends entirely on your skill and ability, not luck.

Memorable moments: The way the Epyx flag theme is twice as long as any of the other national anthems. Nice one.

88 Knight Lore
Released: 1983
Platform: Sinclair Spectrum
Publisher: Ultimate

What's the game: One of the first isometric 3D games for an 8-bit system, and — get this, game designers currently breaking new graphic ground — a great game.

What's the big deal: Gamers probably haven't heard of Ultimate (Play the Game), but they may recognize the names of Ultimate's lead designers, Tim and Chris Stamper. Yup, the duo who are now behind such smash hits as Donkey Kong Country and Killer Instinct (they formed Rare in the late '80s,

to concentrate on development for the NES) are also responsible for some of the early '80's finest gaming hours.

Knight Lore is (arguably) the pick of their 8-bit output, and literally changed the face of gaming overnight.

Memorable moments: Changing into a werewolf as the full moon rises to its peak.

87 Discs of Tron
Released: 1993

Platform: Arcade
Publisher: Midway
What's the game: Combining elements of "The Ring Game" and the spinning discs from the film Tron, Discs of Tron is a battle royale fought by hurling lethal discs into the screen at distant opponents. The aim is to either pulverize your enemies or push them off the platforms; and they make life more difficult by hopping between platforms.

What's the big deal: One of the first games to attempt a 3D environment, Discs of Tron isn't just a simple shooter, Discs can be bounced off walls, and later levels have three platforms of varying height to negotiate. The pace is fast, and the incredibly responsive controls consist of a combination of a joystick (for character movement and firing) and a spinning paddle controller (for aiming the discs). Enemy AI

Jumping Flash!
Released: 1995
Platform: PlayStation
Publisher: Sony

What's the game: A 3D interpretation of the traditional platform game. **Jumping Flash!** features a heavily armed mechanical bunny rabbit (cute 'n' deadly) and a first-person perspective.

What's the big deal: One small step for man, one giant leap for mechanized rabbit-kind — and 3D gameplay. Heralded by the press as the first 3D-bit game to succeed at creating a new genre (it was 3D and it played great), yet underappreciated by the gaming public, **Jumping Flash!** nevertheless remains a classic. Featuring a stinking 3D environment populated by everything from maniacal penguins to laser-spouting griffles, the game's crowning achievement is the vertigo-inducing sense of height as Rabbit leaps from platform to platform.

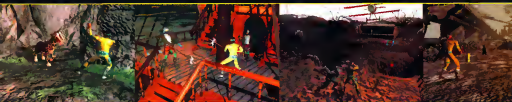
Memorable moments: The bar full of Muz Muz's drowning their sorrows in sauce after having their butts summarily locked by Robot.



You're a robotic rabbit in search of Muz Muz. Add in nice level design and shaded, 3D graphics and you've got a winner

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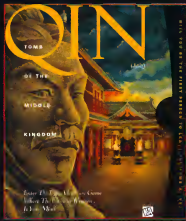
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Joust

Released: 1982

Platform: arcade, PlayStation

Publisher: Williams

What's the game? Plot an ostrich around floating platforms, jousting with buzzed riders, collecting eggs, and avoiding steroids and lava traps.

What's the big deal:

Analysis of John Newcomer's *Joust* still serves as a perfect example of the three ingredients that all too often make a classic: Original concepts, quirky designs, and —

above all — playability. With only three controls (left, right, and flap), *Joust* creates an entire world of elegant combat.

Plus, it can be played either cooperatively or competitively in two-player mode.

Memorable moments: Doing the "butt slide" through the gap on the middle platform to smash someone's head in competitive two-player play. Finding a machine with the "predecessor bug" still in place (good luck).



Joust is a one-screen game, but in that one screen, it fits a complete world's claim: *provides few games can make.*



was fairly advanced for the time, and later levels of the game force players to play against multiple opponents who coordinate their actions. The only disappointing thing about the game is that it doesn't support two human players in head-to-head play — a logical addition that unfortunately never appeared.

Memorable moments: Eventually, devotees become so good that the challenge in the early stages is to merely wing opponents and keep them permanently off-balance, rather than destroy them outright, since more points can be earned by continually hitting them over and over again. This way, extra lives can be earned for the later stages, which can get tough quickly.

85 Leisure Suit Larry (series)

Released: 1987-1996

Platform: PC

Publisher: Sierra

What's the game? Graphic adventure with campy, "adult" themes. And breasts.

What's the big deal: It's not technologically groundbreaking, the adult themes never got much past the level of Playboy Party Jokes (or an episode of

"Baywatch"), but the designers have managed to work in enough campy humor and bad puns to keep the game going through five installments over nine years.

Memorable moments: Explaining to Mom that it's not pornography.

84 Centipede

Released: 1981

Platform: Arcade

Publisher: Atari

What's the game? Shoot a centipede (and spiders, earwigs, ladybugs, and bees, among others) that worm their way down a field of mushrooms. (Millipede adds better graphics and the extra thrill that is DOT).

What's the big deal: First, it's a much cooler concept than just shooting space aliens. Second, any human on the planet can play it well enough to enjoy it. Third, it's hard enough that even excellent gamers find it challenging. Fourth, the control is awesome (trackballs do indeed rule), and it has a definite skills to master (for example, knowing the right moves to: dodge the spider, kill the centipede as fast as possible, and use the mushrooms to your advantage).



Centipede's art won awards, as did its revolutionary gameplay.

Memorable moments: Watching helplessly as dozens of centipede heads appear after you've reached and let the centipede reach the bottom of the screen.

82 Virtua Cop (series)

Released: 1994-1998

Platform: Arcade, Saturn

Publisher: Sega

What's the game? A light-gun shooter in three-dimensional, polygon-based environments.

What's the big deal: Gun shooters have been around since the dawn of videogames, but what makes *Virtua Cop* cool is the polygonal nature of the environment.

Instead of a shot hitting an enemy and resulting in the same dying movie or just the enemy exploding (à la *Mad Dog McCree* or *Hogan's Alley*), shot placement makes a difference. Hit a *Virtua Cop* bad guy in the head and his arm snaps back, hit his knee and he goes down. This adds a level of skill and realism to the game above that of other gun shooters.

Memorable moments: Using two guns on the Saturn version to play John Woo-style.



The best light-gun game ever made: *AM2's Virtua Cop*

81 River Raid

Released: 1982

Platform: Atari 2600

Publisher: Activision

What's the game? An overhead, vertically-scrolling shooter. **What's the big deal:** Nostalgia aside, the 2600 sucks. The joystick sucks. The fact that there's only one button sucks. And the graphics really, really suck. But the game is still great, for one main reason: Level design.

Every section of the river is full of enemies and fuel, and players can get everything (and they'll need to, in the case of fuel, to keep going), but only if they're paying attention. When players die, though, they know it's no one's fault but their own.

Memorable moments:

Accidentally shooting the fuel that's needed to continue.

80 Falcon Gold

Released: 1986

Platform: PC

Publisher: Spectrum HoloByte

What's the game? For its time, Spectrum's *Falcon 3.0 Gold* was a surprisingly ambitious game, made up of shaded polygonal graphics, rigid physical models, and an exciting amount of detail regarding air combat maneuvers, techniques, and strategies.

What's the big deal: Though it is beloved as one of the most demanding flight sims ever, Spectrum HoloByte's uncompromising simulation of the F-16 Fighting Falcon also manages to reign supreme as the most exacting computer simulation created. And as one of the first multiplayer combat simulations ever released, *Falcon* has managed to build a fanatical following of online pilots. If you want to know what it's truly like to fly a \$60 million jet, this is still your best bet.

Memorable moments: During one far-flung east-Asian mission, eagle-eyed pilots can spot one of the most notorious aviator eggs ever put in a computer game — a dragon flying over a nearby city.

79 King's Quest (series)

Released: 1984-1994

Platform: PC

Publisher: Sierra

What's the game? This is one of the longest running adventure game series of all time. Creator Roberta Williams has been the driving force behind every *King's Quest* game, from the early days of the first, primitive 16-color graphics and text-parser interface, to the user-friendly interface and Disney-quality animation of the epic *King's Quest 7: The Princeless Bride*, your adventure.

What's the big deal: Humor, story telling, and classic puzzle implementation make the King's Quest series the most consistent top-quality line-up in computer gaming's history.

Memorable moments: King's Quest V with its superb graphic quality. It was the first graphic adventure to use 256 colors.

78 Track and Field (series)

Released: 1991-1999
Platform: Arcade, PlayStation
Publisher: Konami

What's the game: Track and field events (obviously) reduced to timing and pushing two buttons as fast as possible.

What's the big deal: OK, so the game's play style has little to do with skill at (or even knowledge of) the actual sports. But so what? In a test of pure button pushing endurance, nothing can beat Track and Field, especially when you play with four players. Most of the time, yes, you want a game that challenges your brain, but sometimes, the appeal of button pounding is undeniable.

Memorable moments: Skewering a low-flying turkey with a javelin, or waiting 99 seconds in the arcade version, stepping over the finish line, and finishing with a time of 00:03.

77 Shining Force (series)

Released: 1983
Platform: Genesis, Sega CD
Publisher: Sega

What's the game: A retooling of the traditional console RPG.
What's the big deal: Shining

Force redefined RPG games, chucking the stale character-oriented, turn-based combat that happens almost at random in most RPGs in favor of a series of battles between armies at set moments in the story.

Add hidden characters with strange powers, multiple character classes for each type of soldier, and a brilliant sense of pace (the Shining Force series is possibly the one batch of RPGs that never, ever drags), and you've got the makings of a classic series. The Sega CD version is one of the largest RPGs ever made, incorporating multiple storylines.

Memorable moments: The sense of anticipation as each character changes to an advanced class.

76 NBA Live '96

Released: 1995
Platform: Genesis
Publisher: EA

What's the game: A basketball simulation that actually incorporates many of the features that make us "love this game." **What's the big deal:** One of the hardest sports to translate to videogame form (because of its emphasis on tactic, rather than tactical, skill) basketball has always come up short in its videogame interpretations. But none do a better job than NBA Live '96 at managing to balance the offensive nature of the sport while incorporating the important defensive and strategic elements.

There are still tomahawk and 360° yams galore, but players had better not forget to execute the give-and-go in their half court set



NBA Live '96 continues EA's dominance of sport games

if they intend to win.

Memorable moments: Proving once and for all that the Golden State Warriors don't need a dominant big man (or, indeed, a defense) to win an NBA championship. Amen.

75 Balance of Power

Released: 1945
Platform: PCs
Publisher: Mindscape

What's the game: Assume the role of the President of the U.S. or U.S.S.R. in this strategic game of cold war brinkmanship, designed by Chris Crawford. **What's the big deal:** Although the game's premises are hopelessly outdated (U.S.S.R.? What's that?) and some disagree with the politics, the AI in Balance of Power, combined with its unique play style, make it a classic. **Memorable moments:** Forget diplomacy. Let's have a nuclear war!

74 Tempest

Released: 1981
Platform: Arcade
Publisher: Atari

What's the game: Move around the edges of a futuristic-looking long alley, shooting frantically at things that move up it.

What's the big deal: It's very fast, it has abstract, color vector graphics that remain unequaled to this day, and its novel "paddle" controller makes playing Tempest effortless. The game's difficulty advances smoothly, and the play is extremely well balanced.

To our minds, it remains a zeitgeist of the classic arcade game era: It's space-themed (sort of), with artificial sounding sound effects, abstract graphics, and a goal that, to nonplayers, is nearly unformable. Plus, it gets really hard. (For an arcade-perfect Mac freeware version, check out *Arashi* on the *NG* Online).

Memorable moments: Absently tainting the controller between levels and thus failing — rather cryptically, we feel — to "avoid spikes." Indeed.



Tempest is proof that cabinet art needn't resemble the game

73 AH64-D Longbow

Platform: PC
Publisher: Origin

What's the game: Starting with an impressive graphics engine (that uses texture-mapped terrain and impressive weather and lighting effects) and technical data straight from the world's foremost authority on all things deadly (Jane's), Origin has built a helicopter simulation that looks, feels, and acts the part. **What's the big deal:** Helicopter simulations are a rarity and good ones are even rarer. Longbow is such a game, but it's also fun — something that most simulations tend to sacrifice at the altar of heavy realism. The result is an unbeatable marriage of graphics,

FIFA Soccer

Released: 1994
Platform: 3DO, Genesis
Publisher: EA Sports

What's the game: An arcade style soccer sim with animated players. **What's the big deal:** FIFA Soccer put 3DO on the map (after a year of disappointing titles for the system), and it also breathed life into EA's flagging sports line-up.

Zoosking camera angles gave the feeling of watching an event on TV, yet they never interfered with play mechanics. And thanks to the 3DO's delay-chaining controllers, a total of us could play at once.

Amazingly, the 16-bit Genesis version was almost as good, and FIFA Soccer quickly became the sports sim to beat.

Memorable moments: Breaking by three human-controlled defenses, hammering a shot into the net, and then reveling in the crowd's cheer.



For at least two years, FIFA Soccer won the sports sim to beat all sports sims — even folks who didn't like soccer loved it

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gameplay, and ammo-blasting fun. **Memorable moments:** Performing barrel rolls in a state-of-the-art chopper 1,000 feet off the deck.



Longher's cockpit and displays are painstakingly realistic.

72 Phantasy Star (series)

Released: 1988-1996

Platform: Master System, Genesis

Publisher: Sega

What's the game: Traditional Japanese console-RPG gameplay, but set in a distant galaxy. The setting is an arcane mesh of fantasy sorcery with futuristic weapons, with lots of ground to cover, usually focusing on a desert world, an ice world, and the standard "green hills/blue sky" world. Also, each title in the series has the strange habit of skipping thousands of years since the last installment.

What's the big deal: There really isn't anything especially innovative here — the titles just have good, solid gameplay. More than one *Next Generation* editor fondly (and that "painfully" remembers scraping together the ludicrous \$70 for a Master System cart, then going without sleep that first night. The game just had so much to it — it was easily the largest console RPG released in the U.S., up to that point, it is still perhaps one of the only Sega videogames that manages to capture that dreamy "wow" factor that usually accompanies Nintendo's platform games; there are loads of hidden things, and players never know quite what to expect.

Oddly enough, the best game in the series is still the first, despite the fact that it was on Sega's 8-bit antique. There was a lot more variety in the settings, a deeper storyline, and just plain more of everything. In fact, *Phantasy Star* seemed to lose a little of its luster as the series went on, with the fourth and latest game just going through the same old motions.

Still, because the first couple of games are so incredibly great,

A Mind Forever Voyaging

Released: 1985

Platform: PCs

Publisher: Infocom

What's the game: A text adventure in which players adopt the role of a computer simulation of a human life named PRISM.

What's the big deal: This Steve Meretzky triumph is one of the few games (Chris Crawford's *Balances of Power*, and Square's *Final Fantasy* series are others) to attempt something more deep in the interactive entertainment medium than killing or humor; it presents a grim view of a dark future not by telling you about it, but rather by letting you experience it and do things for yourself. This is interactive entertainment, and it is also that it is not better known or more respected. **Memorable moments:** Try losing your ID card.



"You are not like anyone else," is *MFV's* tag line, except you look like Tim Hutton.

gamers can't deny *Phantasy Star's* place in videogame history.

Memorable moments: The novelty of being able to buy laser cannons and chain mail at the same shop.

70 Metroid (series)

Released: 1989

Platform: NES, Super NES

Publisher: Nintendo

What's the game: Side scrolling action at its best, plus a hefty dose of strategy.

What's the big deal: Yet another branchchild of Shigeru Miyamoto, this time with a science fiction background. The *Metroid* series has always boasted some of the best graphics design it was possible to squeeze out of the 8-bit and 16-bit systems.

Combine this with smooth control, a wealth of ingenious power-up items, and some of the most intricate level designs ever conceived, and it all adds up to a



Super Metroid for the Super NES is the best, but even the Game Boy version is good.

series of games that never fail to impress and challenge. **Memorable moments:** Beating the original game and finding out Samus Aran is a woman — a complete surprise at a time when virtually no other female game heroes existed.

69 Links

Released: 1991

Platform: PC

Publisher: Access Software

What's the game: A photorealistic golf simulation.

What's the big deal: Computer golf may not be everyone's idea of a cool game, but it does have steady adherents, and if you actually play *Links*, everything will become clear. Sure, many still prefer EA's PGA series, but *Links* takes the title by a hair's breadth.

With real life courses, and enough stats, sliders, and options to choke a horse, *Links* re-creates everything but the swing (which is still accomplished with a "three-click" power bar). **Memorable moments:** That first hole-in-one.

68 Pong

Released: 1972

Platform: Multiple

Publisher: Atari, others

What's the game: Swing a paddle across the screen's edge, bouncing a "ball" to the other side and try to get it past the other player's paddle.

And that's the whole bag. **What's the big deal:** *Pong* may be the ultimate two-player game. It is so simple — gaining reduced to its essence — that it becomes the ultimate test of just who is a

better gamer. Sure, *Street Fighter 2* may test more skills (memory, timing, strategy, and flexibility), and therefore be that much more engaging. Indeed, if we're being completely honest, it's hard to imagine Sega AM2's *Yu Suzuki* losing much sleep over the prospect of *Pong* making an arcade comeback. But *Pong's* Zen-like simplicity still has a lot going for it.

Memorable moments: The *Next Generation* staff ignoring hundreds of thousands of dollars of 32-bit software to play *Pong* for hours when the Genesis version was released.

Sad. And yet at the same time, great.

67 F/A-18 Hornet 2.0

Released: 1995

Platform: Macintosh

Publisher: Graphic Simulations

What's the game: A sophisticated flight and combat simulator featuring the F/A-18 Hornet.

What's the big deal: First, you can play across three 21" monitors, for a full panoramic view. Second, the flight model isn't highly accurate. Third, the Mac, with the high refresh rate of its screen (and the game's ability to run at any resolution), makes the graphics amazingly crisp.

Finally, the detail in the worlds is very high, and the graphics are great. **Memorable moments:** Nuking Honolulu (without being blown apart by the pulse), or — alternatively — cluster bombing your own runway and then trying to land on it.

65 Bump 'n' Jump

Released: 1983

Platform: Arcad

Publisher: Data East

What's the game: A 2D top-down vertically-scrolling racing game. At its release in 1983, Bump 'n' Jump offered two new additions to the genre: 1) Bumping. Knocking your opponents into walls or off bridges is recommended, and (wait for it!) 2) Jumping. At many points throughout the game, the road disappears (or bridges end before reaching dry land) and the player must jump his or her car to make it to safety. The action takes place over multiple courses, through multiple season changes. **What's the big deal:** The jumping and bumping are both essential. The variety of cars on the track make for some interesting duels (some are heavier than others — some even have caterpillar tracks), and as two cars race neck and neck toward an opening that really only has room for one car, it's nerve-wracking.

The sensation of speed as the road continues to scroll by underneath the player's airborne (jumping) car is phenomenal, and the jostling for position while on-road (bumping) feels solid and remains consistent.

Sure, a two-player version would have truly made Bump 'n' Jump one of the all-time classics, but even as it is, this one is still great fun and well worth checking out at any arcade.

Memorable moments: Hitting the jump button too early as the end of a bridge approaches, and then gritting your teeth as the car starts descending toward nothing but blue water...

64 Zelda (series)

Released: 1987-1994

Platform: NES, Super NES

Publisher: Nintendo

What's the game: The *Zelda* series began life as a proto-RPG game with action. After veering into pure side-scrolling hell in part two, the game finally settled into its rich: action games with mid-RPG elements.

What's the big deal: As yet another series benefiting from the golden touch of Nintendo's Shigeno Miyamoto, every *Zelda* game (with the exception of the near awful *Link: Legend of Zelda Part 2*) has borne his classic hallmarks. Each installment features simple but effective graphics that pull the best from the system. Each has dead-on play control. And each game progresses by slowly giving the player new powers with which to access new areas, while providing the player with a clear

idea of what to do next. Oh, and, for the record, Robin Williams named his daughter Zelda. **Memorable moments:** Finally getting through the Lost Woods in the first *Zelda* gave a great sense of accomplishment, as was the sense of discovery at walking behind the waterfall. And hey, who doesn't get a kick out of Link's boomerang?

63 Robotron

Released: 1982

Platform: Arcade, PlayStation

Publisher: Williams

What's the game: Defend the last of the human race by running around the screen shooting everything that isn't human.

What's the big deal: Another twitch classic, *Robotron* is all about thinking with the animal portion of your brain. When played on the fastest speed possible (and anyone who doesn't shouldn't be playing), there is just no time to think ahead. You must simply keep reacting until you clear the level, with strategic thought possible on only the most rudimentary level. Another plus is that all the enemies of a level are visible as soon as it starts, so players know exactly what they must do. All this action is enabled by the dual



In *Robotron*, save the last human or die. Actually, you die anyway

joystick, which lets you fire and move in different directions. Someone once said, "You're about two seconds from dying at all times when playing *Robotron*, and that's what makes it so great." We couldn't agree more. **Memorable moments:** Finding the secret 'Vidiks' copyright notice.

62 Bard's Tale (series)

Released: 1983-1988

Platform: PCs

Publisher: EA

What's the game: A game series in three stages that brought turn-based computer role-playing games to a new level of both graphic and plot detail.

What's the big deal: Multiple display windows enabled the player to view their party's

attributes, the NPCs they were speaking to, and execute commands all in one simple-to-use interface. The plot development of the games were also second to none. **Memorable moments:** Stumbling upon your first red dragon.

61 Ikari Warriors

Released: 1986

Platform: Arcade

Publisher: Taito West

What's the game: A two-player vertically-scrolling (with room for the occasional left-to-right shimmy) soldier game in the Commando style. *Ikari Warriors'* chief attraction was its innovative joysticks. Each 'stick offered an eight-way directional controller to guide your commando around, but it also had an extra analog rotating controller on top, which enabled you to aim your bullets and grenades independently of the direction in which you're walking. Great stuff.

What's the big deal: This is another one of these classic old arcade titles that simply "feels" great. The play balance is awesome, the levels interesting, and the two-player mode rocks.

Best of all, however, are the power-ups which truly offer a feeling of increased potency and "I can take on the world" jingoism, without losing the game's challenge. Each player starts off with standard grenades and machine guns. But pick up the right icons, and these become "red" grenades, or "red" machine guns — and the world all of a sudden feels a whole lot less dangerous (for you, at least). **Memorable moment:** Red grenades and red machine guns.

60 Wizardry (series)

Released: 1981-1996

Platform: PC

Publisher: Sir-Tech

What's the game: A series of eight roleplaying games that went from being among the '80's most simple graphic adventures, to being among the best graphic adventures of the early '90s. A great example of evolution.



There are eight great games in Sir-Tech's Wizardry series

Super Sprint
Released: 1988
Platform: Arcade
Publisher: Atari

What's the game: A one-, two-, or three-player, overhead view racing game with single-slane tracks and massive — no, really — massive, understeer.

What's the big deal: Spin that wheel. Spin it around and around. Spin it or the car simply won't turn.

Despite the unreality of the control, it works perfectly in *Super Sprint*, adding a great sense of urgency to the proceedings. The fact that players are often racing against friends standing right next to them also adds to the sense of excitement (and of course, the temptation to grab their wheel and spin it the wrong way adds a little edge to the game). It's also worth mentioning that *Super Sprint* ain't half bad as a single player game, too.

Memorable moments: When you know you're going to lose a race, driving backward and taking out the car in first place.

Little tracks, bumpy tracks, and those vaguely flaccid turbo-boosts combine to give *Super Sprint* a place in history



The good news is, you've just inherited an island resort from your dead uncle.

The bad news is, your uncle was first twisted son of a bitch.

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EXPLAINS IT YOURSELF



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What's the big deal: Huge dungeons with elaborate quests and tons of differing enemies. The later games had an innovative combat engine with excellent weapons and spells. **Memorable moments:** Crossing the river Styx in Wizardry VII; Crusaders of the Dark Savant.

57 Sega Rally

Released: 1995

Platform: Arcade, Saturn
Publisher: Sega

What's the game: An authentic rally game over a variety of terrain and four courses.

What's the big deal: What separates Sega Rally from the pack is the excellent feel of the



Sega Rally's split-screen format and lockable co-pilot set it apart.

car when you're driving. Even on Saturn, the car just feels "leewier" to drive (and thus more realistic) than such lightweights as Ridge Racer. The control is great, too, with powerslides, accurate physics, and a real sense of realism as the car handles differently on various terrains. The inclusion of solid competitor AI, and the need to actually pay attention to your (somewhat suspect) co-pilot if you want to do well. Both add significantly to the experience. **Memorable moments:** A co-pilot who randomly calls you "baby."

56 Dragon Warrior (series)

Released: 1987-1995

Platform: NES, Super NES
Publisher: Enix

What's the game: Another series of Japanese style RPGs, the Dragon Warrior series has a following among fans who are as dedicated now as ever.

What's the big deal: The original Dragon Warrior was probably the first ever "Japanese style" RPG, and hence set up many of the conventions that others would follow. While never as ambitious as Square's Final Fantasy series, later installments of Dragon

Warrior can't be beaten for sheer ease (if you only had enough cash to buy you one game that had to last you a month, you bought a Dragon Warrior title).

Memorable moments: Perhaps the most memorable events actually occurred outside the games themselves. Known as Dragon Quest in Japan, the first four installments were so popular that thousands of fans would skip school and camp outside of stores for days just to get their hands on a copy. Fights were common, and there were even instances of students being mugged for their copies on the way back from stores.

Those were the days...

55 Ultima (series)

Released: 1980-1996

Platform: PC
Publisher: Origin

What's the game: More than just another dungeon explore-athon, the Ultima series has won over legions of loyal followers with the tale of the Avatar — an unwitting 20th century hero who finds him/herself on a distant world known as Britannia, a medieval world under constant threat from the Guardian.

What's the big deal: What sets the Ultima series apart from most roleplaying sagas is that from the beginning there's been an uncompromising sense of right and wrong, with the player cast among a sea of characters with varying morals and motives. Rather than hacking your way through labyrinth after labyrinth, it's up to you to learn when you can push somebody off a cliff and when you might need to use more pedestrian means of coercion to gain the information you need to defeat the big boss.

While the graphics and playing style change with the technological leaps of the day, Origin's Ultima series has been the most consistent source of roleplaying excitement in history. **Memorable moments:** With a little help from Looking Glass Technologies (then known as Blue Sky Software) Origin's Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss delivered one of the first fully interactive 3D environments with the ability to look up, down, fly, swim and jump almost a full year before Id Software's legendary Doom made its debut.

54 MechWarrior 2

Released: 1995

Platform: PC, Mac
Publisher: Activision

What's the game: A single player and networkable battlematch combat game based upon the FASA universe.



Setting 'mechs empty doesn't get better than MechWarrior 2.

What's the big deal: The ability to customize your mechs and network with other players brings home the BattleMech combat experience that used to cost upward of \$5 per hour.

Memorable moments: Using your feet-footed little Jenner and blowing the hell out your buddy's monstrous Atlas.

52 Spaceward Ho!

Released: 1986

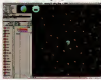
Platform: Mac, PC
Publisher: Datto Yoo

What's the game: Space combat, strategy, and exploration.

What's the big deal: Thanks to its simplicity (the galaxy only has one resource, "metal" — this is an easy game to learn. But it isn't easy to master, because in addition to just finding and colonizing planets with metal, you also have to worry about terraforming planets to get big populations (which leads to big money) and managing research budgets and warship building.

Winning an easy level game on your first try isn't uncommon, but there's a deceptive amount of depth here, and the replay value is off the scale. And then there's the eight-player game...

Memorable moments: Naming a star after winning a game.



Spaceward Ho's heavy graphics and sound FX keep you checking.

51 Panzer General

Released: 1994

Platform: PC, PlayStation, 3DO
Publisher:SSI

What's the game: A one- or two-player, hex-based strategy game

Star Wars Arcade

Released: 1983

Platform: Arcade
Publisher: Atari

What's the game: First-person, color vector graphics space shooter. In an X-Wing.

What's the big deal: Awesome vector graphics, multiple triggers, a deluxe cabinet with powerful speakers in the back, digitized voices, and, yes, it's all set in the Star Wars universe. Probably the best licensed game ever.

It's easy enough for anyone to blow up the Death Star once, but hard enough to make blowing it up 10 times in one game something to brag about.

Memorable Moments: Using the Force in the Death Star trench to score extra points. But ultimately, "And remember: The Force will be with you. Always."



Using the Force means flying the trench without shooting — supernatural indeed.



The Sentinel

Released: 1988

Platform: PCs

Publisher: Firebird

What's the game: Players are trapped in a 3D world, rather like a huge chess board with a sculptured terrain. Every level is dominated by at least one sentinel, a robotic guardian who occupies the commanding heights and constantly roams to survey the panorama beneath him. The player's objective is to ascend to the highest point (progress is made by a process of clearing yourself), until he or she is able to reach the sentinel's position. They then complete the level. At which point, the player only has 9,999 levels to go until the end of the game (we're serious).

What's the big deal: Tension. Absolute, paranoid, scrambling tension. As the player falls into the sentinel's gaze as he roams, the player will lose energy. So he'd better run, and fast. Run for any cover possible in the crazy mountainside.

Memorable moments: Dreaming of the haunting stars of the sentinel. Let's move on...



The Sentinel's simple graphics belie the awful complexity of knowing the sentinel is watching you. No, really. We're serious.

recreating the campaigns and battles of WWII.

What's the big deal: The amount of complexity that Panzer General provided while still maintaining a fairly simple interface was extraordinary. Supply lines, reinforcements, terrain, visibility — all are factors in the air, sea, and land-based combat.

Memorable moments: Marching through the neutral countries of Belgium and the Netherlands in your efforts to get to France.

50 Donkey Kong

Released: 1981

Platform: Arcade, Coleco

ADAM, Atari 7900

Publisher: Nintendo

What's the game: Help hapless plumber Mario (in his videogame debut) rescue his girlfriend (hey — that isn't Princess Toadstool!) from Donkey Kong (an interesting mistranslation of the Japanese phrase for "stubborn monkey").



Hey, who's that plumber? The world won't be the same again!

What's the big deal: Let's see...

Shigeru Miyamoto's debut game...The introduction of two of the best setting and most popular mascots of all time...The game that convinced Nintendo to take videogames more seriously than playing cards...The subject of the first (of many) far-reaching videogame lawsuits in America...

But even ignoring all this historical fluff, Donkey Kong stands on its own as a great game requiring split-second timing and great hand-eye coordination. The graphics, too, should not be overlooked. Today, with games that scroll

characters can be much larger and more detailed. But we defy anyone to show us a character that can fit, along with an entire game, on one screen, and still look as good as Mario. **Memorable moments:** How high can you get? 150 meters.

49 Command & Conquer

Released: 1995

Platform: PC

Publisher: Virgin

What's the game: Futuristic strategic warfare on a grand scale, as opposing armies thrash each other with tanks, bazookas, airstrikes, elite troops, and even nuclear warheads to gain control of territories and power. A vivid storyline comes the player through the one-player campaign (play either good guy or bad guy) and there are plenty of

multiplayer campaigns for generals with network links, too.

What's the big deal: The first really big game of its type, Command & Conquer brought war gaming out of its prehistoric, hexagonal mire and made it cool. Funky futuristic weapons, a thumping rock soundtrack, and fast-paced yet intelligently headed gameplay make this one of the most accessible and engrossing war games yet devised. And the presentation is so swish, even the installation routine is jaw-droppingly good.

Memorable moments: Virgin U.K.'s controversial ad campaign for Command & Conquer, which ended up being banned. One print ad featured a photo of Adolf Hitler surveying tens of thousands of Nazi troops with the headline "It's a great feeling."

Another showed pictures of such historical "leaders" as Mussolini, Stalin, and Attila the Hun with the headline "Previous



Command & Conquer's simple interface makes it a joy to play

High Scores." Not surprisingly, the campaign wasn't brought to the United States.

48 World Series Baseball

Released: 1995

Platform: Saturn

Publisher: Sega

What's the game: A baseball simulation game with more emphasis on entertaining gameplay than generating mountains of statistics.

What's the big deal: This is the best-looking and best-playing baseball videogame of all time.

Immediately noticeable is the smooth control, exceptional graphics, and fast-paced (for baseball) gameplay. Hard-core baseball fans may complain about the lack of extensive statistical libraries, and the emphasis on the arcade-type game play over true simulation, but for the majority of gamers, World Series Baseball accomplishes the significant feat of eliminating the boredom from America's favorite pastime.

Memorable moments: The struggle to stifle uncontrollable fits of laughter while playing the Japanese import version of the game (called Greatest Nine) when the announcer — for no obvious reason — seems to call you an "itchy bastard." Hmm...



The best baseball game in the world: World Series Baseball

47 WorldWide Soccer 2

Released: 1995

Platform: Saturn

Publisher: Sega

What's the game: A great soccer game with an ever-so-slight preference for arcade-type gameplay over true simulation. **What's the big deal:** This is the soccer game that all soccer games aspire to be.

Utterly realistic player animation is the high point of its gorgeous graphics, but the truly revolutionary aspect of WorldWide Soccer 2 is the simple, intuitive, yet comprehensive control of all the players in the game. From ball heel passes, to bicycle kicks, to diving headers, WorldWide Soccer II is so good

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(Want to Play?)

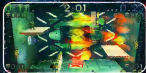
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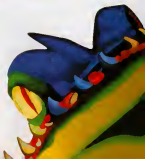
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that it makes soccer fans of those who previously derided the world's most popular sport. **Memorable moments:** The pass goes deep into the right corner... A beautiful dribble to lose the defender... And now a centering pass to the front of the penalty area... "GOODMALL (etc.)"

40 Formula One Grand Prix 2

Released: 1999

Platform: PC

Publisher: Microprose

What's the game: Perhaps the most sophisticated and realistic driving game ever created (and yes, we do feel guilty about leaving out Papyrus' superlative NASCAR Racing, but — hey — space is limited).

What's the big deal: OK, so it shouldn't affect its pricing in this list, but it is worth mentioning that this game is essentially the work of just one man, that being Geoff Crammond. And as much as F1GP2 perhaps marks the very last time one man can attempt and complete a project of such magnitude alone, it also stands as a monument to what can be achieved by the vision, ambition, and noble goal of aiming for the very top that just isn't possible when "designing by committee."

F1GP2 may not be for gamers reared on OutRun or Pole Position, but for those who value realism above arcade thrills, there's nothing better. **Memorable moments:** Grabbing pole position for the very first time (and the race proper hasn't even started yet).

44 Spectre VR

Released: 1993

Platform: Mac

Publisher: Velocity

What's the game: Multiple players play capture the flag with flat-shaded polygon 3D tanks.

What's the big deal: The minimalist, hi-res, flat-shaded poly give Spectre VR an awesome '80s cyberpunk look (never mind that it was released in 1993), the control is perfect, even with the keyboard (how many Mac users have joysticks?), and the one-player mode has hundreds of levels and gets really, really hard. You can even customize your tank.

But most important is the network mode (up to eight on AppleTalk), which provides a nice platform for fast and furious multiplayer combat without the grainy texture-maps of Doom or the confusing six-degrees-of-movement of Descent.

Memorable moments: Four words: Those orange super tanks.

43 Rolling Thunder

Released: 1997

Platform: Arcade

Publisher: Namco

What's the game: Side-scrolling platform shooter, with lots of boxes to duck behind, panthers to shoot, and a choice between a male and female character.

What's the big deal: A controversial choice, we know. But what separates Rolling Thunder from lesser side-scrollers is the fact that everything gels together perfectly: the long-legged characters, the wonderfully designed levels, the weapons, the use of panthers as enemies, your character's ability to duck behind boxes, the constant need to jump from the floor to raised platforms, and some great, great music.

This is what happens when everything comes together.

Memorable moments: Machine-gunning your first panther.

42 EF2000

Released: 1995

Platform: PC

Publisher: Ocean

What's the game: Ocean's air combat simulator that puts players in the cockpit of the EuroFighter, a highly advanced air-superiority plane developed for use "in mutual defense operations for the European Community."

What's the big deal: Using state-of-the-art, high-resolution graphics and detailed flight models, EF2000 is one of the few flight simulations that actually delivers a "you-are-there" experience.

Boosting features such as fully textured landscapes, extremely detailed objects, and subtle weather effects such as



Take to the skies in EF2000, the most exciting combat sim of all.

clouds, rain and snow, this rocks.

But jaw-dropping graphics and devilish missions are just the start of EF2000's multifaceted attack on the senses with tons of detail that encompasses everything from the subtle bobbing of turbulence to massive G-forces crushing you in your



OutRun

Released: 1986

Platform: Arcade

Publisher: Sega

What's the game:

1986's OutRun was Yu Suzuki's first four-wheel racer (he'd released the motorcycle-based Hang On in 1985), and it's still one of the best.

OutRun was the first major commercial hit to feature branching courses, power-ups, a force-feedback steering wheel, and undulating hills. The game was a race between a Ferrari Testarossa and a mixed bag of VW bugs, Porches, and 18-wheeled trucks. A blonde sweetheart is at the player's side throughout, as the race against time continues from check point to check point.

What's the big deal: OutRun broke so many rules and pushed the racing genre so far forward that it would be easy to think that it has earned its place in Next Generation's top 100 list for being so revolutionary at the time. Not so. OutRun is still one of the most enjoyable single-player racing games available in the arcades, and regularly gets taken for a spin around the block by many at our office.

The power-ups (complete with smoking tires and screeching sound effects), the ability to change lanes, the need to use both gears and brakes to slow down, and Suzuki's trademark handling make OutRun an all-time classic. The graphics still impress (it's a prime example of form following function), and locking the steering wheel onto a long power-slide at maximum rpm as palm trees and billboards rush by is still one of the most exhilarating experiences gaming has to offer.

Memorable moments: There are three: 1) Getting to choose your own in-game music on the car's radio ("Magic Sound Shower," "Splash Wave," or "Summer Shower"); 2) Your blonde "date" bricking at you after particularly bad crashes; 3) Deliberately crashing into the nearest tree crash barrier as the clock hits zero so the game ends with the frozen picture of your car in mid-air (come on, we all did it at least once or twice).



seat.

It's simply the most immersive combat flight sim on the market.

Memorable moments: While the vapor trails of incoming missiles are cool, most jacks who've survived EF2000's demanding missions find that topping off their fighter's fuel tank while lisking up with a refueling wing at 35,000 feet is a sight that has to be seen to be believed.

41 "Snake Game"

Released: unknown

Platforms: multiple

Publisher: multiple

What's the game: A "snake" moves around the screen, eating

objects. As he eats he grows. If his head hits his tail, he dies.

What's the big deal: The origins of this game are lost in time (we first played it on an Apple II, with the snake eating mice), but it has appeared on platforms as diverse



Don't bite your own ass: A role in the "snake game," and life

as the Commodore VIC-20 and the Hewlett-Packard LX200 pinpoint PDA. What makes the game so great? Probably that it requires a healthy mix of fast reaction times and forethought. Fast reaction times to get you out of jams (or to make quick turns to grab the apple, or whatever), and forethought to ensure that you always leave yourself an "out."

Memorable moments: In *Snakes Alive* (shareware for the Mac) gamers can actually eat their own dead body to regain health if they accidentally bump into themselves.

40 NHL Powerplay

Released: 1996

Platform: Saturn, PlayStation
Publisher: Virgin

What's the game: The game that stole the torch from EA's NHL series and brought the sport of hockey into the 32-bit age.

What's the big deal: NHL Powerplay offers all the excitement, ferocity, precision, and strategy of the real thing without the pain. Everything that made the NHL series from Electronic Arts the definitive hockey videogame series has been preserved for Virgin's interpretation.

What has been added are polygon-based players and an AI that actually challenges the gamer. No hockey game has ever looked as good or played as well as this one. Both the Saturn and the PlayStation versions are exceptional, but the edge in graphics goes to the Saturn version, while PlayStation boasts



NHL Powerplay is a worthy challenger to EA's NHL series

slightly faster gameplay. **Memorable moments:** Slamming an opponent into the boards and then leaving his teammate helplessly spinning on the ice as you steal the puck and race toward the goal on a breakaway.

38 Zork (series)

Released: 1980-1989

Platform: PCs
Publisher: Infocom

What's the game: Text adventures, with the treasure hunting and mystery solving (and no, we're not including the latest incarnation, *Zork Nemesis*).

What's the big deal: A work of "interactive fiction," Dave Lebling's and Marc Blank's masterwork *Zork* is about 1,000 times deeper than the "interactive" multimedia crap foisted on gamers today. Forget that *Zork*, when released, was a revolution in computer AI, and forget that *Zork* fundamentally

shaped the plots of hundreds of adventure games that followed (all while acknowledging that *Zork* itself owes a lot to the mainframe game *Adventure*).

Instead, look at the game (*Zork II* was originally one game) as though you've never seen it before, and you'll discover some of the best puzzles, most entertaining humor, high-quality writing, and regally clear descriptions ever to grace a computer game. And since it's text, you create the pictures in your head. To us, this offers a far more immersive experience than the ultimately boring pre-rendered slots in vogue today.

Are we saying all graphic adventures suck? No, of course not. The point is that text adventures in general, and *Zork* in particular, can offer a greater variety of puzzles, more explorative areas, and better plot development than graphic adventures. Less is often more. Some criticize the weird mixing of technology and fantasy in the series. For us, this casual disregard for "realism" is exactly what is so appealing. **Memorable moments:** Using "Take it" in *Zork II* to win with only one treasure.

37 Super Mario Kart

Released: 1992

Platform: Super NES
Publisher: Nintendo

What's the game: Two players each pick a character from the Mario universe and take to the dirt track for a dose of fun 'n'

frantic go-kart racing. Sounds basic? Wait until you try it.

What's the big deal: As with seemingly all games touched by Shigeru Miyamoto (he had a hand in the design of this one), *Super Mario Kart* offers bits of control with a view to offering supreme fun. Dust off the 16-bit cartridge, slip it into a Super NES and you'll soon discover that power-slides are every bit as exciting in a go-kart driven by a cartoon plumber as they are in the turbo-charged Indy cars of Daytona USA.

This — along with that other Super NES racing classic, *F-Zero* — is more proof from Nintendo that millions of polygons don't necessarily make a better game. **Memorable moments:** Donkey Kong throwing bananas at you.



Mario Kart is so good you play in spite of its clunky controls. The race online shows below. The real action is up top.

36 Rescue Raiders (aka Armor Alley)

Released: 1984

Platform: Mac, Apple II
Publisher: 380/Sie-Teck

What's the game: A 2D, side-scrolling, arcade, helicopter, combat and strategy game. **What's the big deal:** Think *Choplifter* on steroids, crack cocaine, and speed. And probably for too much caffeine, also.

Rescue Raiders pits players against an enemy located at the other end of a battlefield. To defeat him, you have a budget to buy tanks, trucks, troops (which you can ferry and parachute into battle from your chopper), and SAM jeeps. On the way to your enemy's HQ, you'll find various obstacles, neutral bases, and of course, enemy tanks, troops, jeeps, and trucks. Every vehicle moves either left-to-right or right-to-left and there is a learnable hierarchy of who would win when the vehicles meet, so a strategy for victory slowly emerges for each level. But the wildcard is the helicopter, which packs bombs and Gatling guns. If players aren't prepared to provide air support for their tanks and sappers (and to



You know it, you've played it, and if you're reading this magazine, you probably still love it

origin of PDP-1 computers) with the addition of Asteroids player maneuver her or her ship around the screen is as complex as the constant juggling of speed, positioning, and direction. The vector, or X-Y screen, and black and white graphics give the game a nostalgic look today, but the gameplay is still 100% right. And the sound effects have never been bettered.

Memorable moments: Watching novice players "hyperpace" themselves directly into an asteroid.



Asteroids

Released: 1979
Platform: Arcade
Publisher: Atari

What's the game: Destroy waves of asteroids and UFOs from a tiny ship, controlled with thrust and directional commands.

What's the big deal: The dynamics of control are taken directly from *SpaceWar!* (Steve Russell's tribute to your ship's noob). To see a master

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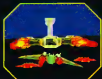
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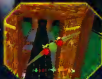
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Duke Nukem 3D**Released:** 1996**Platform:** PC**Publisher:** 3D Realms**What's the game:** First-person multiplayer shooter. (Oh, all right then, "it's a bit like Doom.")**What's the big deal:** OK, it's just like Doom, but with way more complex levels, weapons, plus it's got a better 3D engine and higher resolution graphics. But it's Duke Nukem's additions to the genre that make it, for many, the game Duke should have been. Eight-player games are possible, it boasts some great humorous touches, the weapon selection is unsurpassed, and — best of all —

players can interact with the backgrounds to an extent beyond that of any of its predecessors.

Memorable moments: Gating coltars to strappers. Cheap, sure. Smart, probably. But a lot of fun.

Blistering action, sprawling 3D environments, a pretty weird selection of weapons, and plenty of cheap laughs are the hallmarks of Duke Nukem 3D — but the real question is, does anyone remember the original Duke Nukem?



deny the skies to the enemy), they can't win.

Memorable moments: Strafing enemy troops (preferred soundtrack, 1812 Overture).**34 Nobunaga's Ambition (series)****Released:** 1988**Platform:** PC, NES, Super NES**Publisher:** Koei**What's the game:** A series of increasingly complex strategy games based on a turbulent period in medieval Japanese history. Players don't just have to worry about moving armies, but must keep track of which neighboring lords can be trusted, make sure the peasants are happy, hire vassals, and attend to a myriad of other details.**What's the big deal:** Koei's strategy games are practically a genre unto themselves, and they have only enjoyed limited cult success in the U.S. In fact, they're often billed as "historical simulations" rather than games.Lead designer Shou Kibasawa is a tactical genius who realizes that domestic and military strategies are interconnected, and that feeding armies can only be accomplished after building an infrastructure to support them. As a result, Nobunaga's Ambition boasts a level of strategic complexity few other series can come close to matching. **Memorable moments:** Winning a game. It doesn't happen often.**33 SimCity 2000****Released:** 1999-1990**Platform:** Mac, PC**Publisher:** Maxis**What's the game:** Urban planning and budget simulator. There's no real "goal," but most people simply try to grow their city as big as they can.**What's the big deal:** It sounds wickedly boring, but anyone who has played SimCity (either version) can tell you that it is easily one of the most enthralling games playable.

Creating your city's map, zoning for different areas, laying down roads, building ballparks, dealing with disasters (from plane crashes to monsters attacking), raising taxes, well, it all makes players feel a little like a God. Or a Kennedy, anyway.

Memorable moments: POPRT/PS/GUZZAROO, or for SimCity Classic players: FUNO.**32 Wipeout XL****Released:** 1999**Platform:** PlayStation**Publisher:** Psygnosis**What's the game:** Futuristic two-player racing game with a techno soundtrack and graphic design by Designer's Resonance.**What's the big deal:** First, the 3D graphics could very well be a technology demo for PlayStation — they're bold, snip and clean. Second, it corrects all the little niggles of the original, and makes it the game it should have been, had it not been pushed to market:

Wipeout XL takes a great game and makes it ten times better

There are better tracks, better combat, better competitor AI, better graphics and, amazingly, better music. Flying linked Wipeout comes close to gaming at its very best.

Memorable moments: Grabbing a nitro power-up to steal a win on the final straight, or — and this comes close — landing on your opponent after a jump.**31 Herzog Zwei****Released:** 1991**Platform:** Genesis**Publisher:** Sega**What's the game:** A two-player, split-screen, realtime, action-strategy game in which gamers build tanks and troops and other equipment at a home base and then use a hovercraft-plane to ferry them around the battlefield, taking over neutral bases along

the way. To win the game, players need to get their troops into the enemy's home base.

What's the big deal: Herzog Zwei is arguably the inspiration for such two-player hits as Return Fire, Cannon Fodder, and perhaps even Command & Conquer. But what makes it a classic is the fact that the level design in single-player mode is absolutely phenomenal, with a smooth learning and difficulty curve.

The play is tuned to require a combination of strategic and arcade skills — possessing only one simply won't cut it. Despite its obvious appeal and influence, it was never a typical "arcade game" and the franchise was never expanded by Sega.

Memorable moments: In two-player mode, dropping some troops next to your opponent's home base as your first action in the game, beating him before he produces even one tank. (A tactic that tends to work only once.)**30 Madden Football (series)****Released:** 1993-1999**Platform:** Genesis**Publisher:** EA**What's the game:** Despite NFL Gameday recently stealing its sports crown in the 32-bit arena, EA's ongoing John Madden Football series is still the career leader for videogame football. **What's the big deal:** One of the best two-player games of all time, the game that reinvented EA, and (along with Sonic the Hedgehog) the game that launched Sega's 16-bit assault on Nintendo.

The original John Madden Football was the first game that looked, played, and felt like real football. It wasn't just good; it was revolutionary.

Memorable moments: Actually blocking an extra point try in the first Madden only to have the computer award the point to your opponent. The game's one and only glitch. But a big one.

The game that invented EA Sports (and helped Sega's Genesis) John Madden Football

29 Syndicate

Released: 1993

Platform: PC, Genesis

Publisher: Bullfrog

What's the game: A realtime, three-quarter, top-down criminal strategy game in which gamers equip a team of four agents, acquire new technologies, and attempt to crush their enemies with a view to — and let's not be coy — ruling the world.

What's the big deal: It's fast, furious and tons of fun.

While the realtime action was a big portion of its success, Syndicate's complete disregard for role-playing computer game themes (gamers play the bad guy) was the real key to success. Starting with 1987's *Apocalypse*, Peter Molyneux's Bullfrog made a name for itself creating games with terrific depth, and Syndicate cemented this reputation further. Although the title has achieved only modest success on the home consoles, PC gamers seemingly can't get enough, and the anticipation for Syndicate 2 is almost at fever pitch.

Memorable moments: Sadistic Syndicate players (and if you're not a sadist when you start playing, you will be by the end) could entertain themselves for hours by turning their team's flamer on the civilian populace, turning them into human torches. Fun for all the entire family.



In *Syndicate*, you can control people's minds, then kill them

28 NFL Gameday

Released: 1995

Platform: PlayStation

Publisher: Sony CE

What's the game: A great-looking and great-playing football sim game with fast-paced, intuitive gameplay for Monday-morning quarterbacks everywhere.

What's the big deal: Another sports game that owes much to an EA's Madden series, NFL Gameday not only plays like real football, it looks like it, too.

But where Gameday really scores is on its ability to offer "jump-in-on-play" accessibility for the novice while offering

Sam and Max Hit the Road

Released: 1994

Platform: PC, Mac

Publisher: LucasArts

What's the game: This is the quintessential

LucasArts graphic adventure (actually, there were fierce arguments as to whether this one was better than *The Secret of Monkey Island 2* or *The Day of the Tentacle*, but Sam's and Max's goofy charm eventually won out). Players point and click on prerendered screens, guiding Sam and Max around, talking to the characters they meet, and manipulating the objects that they find lying around. Oh, and the object of the game is to discover the mystery of missing Big Foot.

What's the big deal: This game is fun. "I'm Sam. He's Max. We bust punks," Sam explains at the very beginning.

Except, of course, that Sam is a laconic canine Bogart, and Max is a psychopomp bunny. The world

that they explore (created by cartoonist Steve Purcell) is filled with the surreal and the ridiculous, and the unlikely duo's adventure across the U.S.A. constantly challenges, surprises, and entertains.

Memorable moments: When Sam breaks down crying after being asked to do something he can't do too many times. "Jeez. Give the big guy a break!" peaches a visibly upset Max.



The often funny, occasionally illegal, sometimes lethal antics of Sam and Max put it near the top



significant depth for old pros to explore and exploit.

As is often the case with sports games, the AI is merely average after learning its tendencies and weaknesses, but much is expected of Gameday 2. **Memorable moments:** Oh, to have been a fly on the wall at Electronic Arts when they realized that their videogame football crown had been stolen from under their noses...



NFL Gameday stole Madden's crown, for the moment at least

26 X-COM: UFO Defense

Released: 1994

Platform: PC

Publisher: MicroProse

What's the game: Turn-based strategy meets squad-level excitement, as you build, research, and equip your team of X-COM agents to battle against a diabolical, alien invasion force. Part war game, part "X-Files", X-COM uses a three-quarter top-down perspective, offers wonderfully animated characters, and a mouse-based interface that does away with dull menu bars and hexes, putting the emphasis back on smooth gameplay.

What's the big deal: X-COM breathed new life into the turn-based strategy genre by dishing out huge amounts of pulse-pounding reasons, genuinely creepy alien attackers, and engaging research, while tricking players into thinking they are playing a realtime action game.

Memorable moments: Landing in an occupied city, then watching in horror as your panic-stricken



X-COM's ET's are definitely not the cuddly "please home" type

soldiers see the battlefield only to be shot in the back by alien attackers. Doth.

25 Nights

Released: 1996

Platform: Saturn

Publisher: Sega

What's the game: Play a girl or boy enjoying a shard dream as they climb into a special suit and turn into "Nights." Then, fly around with stars coming out of your hands, making skill shots through hoops, and picking up blue chips in a quest to obtain large gems. But it's more complicated than that.

What's the big deal: Thanks to Yui Naka and his Sonic Team's custom graphics routines, Nights manages to boast transparency and true-fog shading — things that, officially at least, "can't be done" on Saturn.

The game also has a sense of speed in a 3D game that we haven't seen before. The graphics, art, and music design are also stunning. Most



The start of something wonderful: *Nights*

significant of all, however, is the fact that Nights represents the creation of a new genre that simply wouldn't have been possible with 16-bit. It is to Saturn what *Jumping Flash!* and *Toshinden* are for PlayStation.

Part flying game, part racing game (and part *Pinotops*-style skill testing), Nights successfully challenges the notion that all games must fit into previously successful genres (much as the original *Sonic* did). The control of the game, aided by Sega's new analog pad is awesome — it just

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X-Wing/Tie Fighter

Released: 1994

Platform: PC, Mac

Publisher: LucasArts

What's the game: One-player space-combat flight sims in which the player enters the Star Wars universe as a member of the Alliance or the Empire. To win the game player must survive a series of missions while completing additional complex objectives.

What's the big deal: Of course, it's difficult to go wrong with Star Wars, and both of these games have wonderful graphics and sound effects. But the best part of it all is the feeling of accomplishment after finishing a difficult mission. The game largely revolves around figuring out which squadrons of the opposition have what objectives, and then formulating a strategy for stopping them. The flight engine and resulting combat is second to none in the genre.

Memorable moments: Without question, the first time players engage a Star Destroyer, and — of course — blowing up the Death Star.



Space combat sims don't get any better than the X-Wing and Tie Fighter series, whichever side you fly for.

**22 Tekken II**

Released: 1996

Platform: PlayStation

Publisher: Namco

What's the game: Three-dimensional polygon brawler (actually the game is essentially 2D, but it's set in a 3D world). **What's the big deal:** Tekken 2 is living proof that home console versions don't have to be strangled down from the arcade. When Namco converted Tekken 2 for PlayStation, it added so many new features that the home version is the preferable one. Besides the 20-plus playable



Better than the arcade? Tekken 2 for PS-X proves it can be done.

"feels right." Next Generation is also impressed with the significance of the storyline (it's not often you'll hear us say this).

Although at first blush it seems short (there are only eight levels and seven bosses), *Nights* actually offers an impressive amount of replay value for a 32-bit game. Sega will have a difficult time positioning *Nights* in the market, but it is a game that anyone who values originality and quality game design should own. **Memorable moments:** Simply flying around...

24 Lurking Horror

Released: 1987

Platform: PCs

Publisher: Infocom

What's the game: A horror-based text adventure set as a thinly veiled Massachusetts Institute of Technology (George Underwood Edwards University).

What's the big deal: See the Zork entry for our creed on text adventures because for this we'll concentrate solely on *Lurking Horror's* story. Dave Lebling's creation is, in our view, the best adventure game of all time. Not only are the puzzles spot



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A sleek CD case with *Lurking Horror*; a nice, realistic touch.

on genius, the writing is fantastic — a brilliant combination of the realism of Stephen King (the *Funnybones*, the *Coca-Cola*) and the nameless, strangling horrors of H.P. Lovecraft.

The setting, a gothic university campus with a surfeit of underground steam tunnels, is perfect for a game of this type (for us, text adventures will always be linked to the terminals of college campuses), and the game is one of only two in the horror genre that has ever seemed genuinely scary (*Resident Evil* is the other). **Memorable moments:** The urchin (a familiar site to anyone who has ever been to MIT), the Tomb of the Unknown Tool (we only wish we could give directions to its

real-world counterpart without legal problems), and — of course — the graffiti in the elevator ("God is Dead — Nietzsche, Nietzsche is Dead — God"). **22 Tekken II** Released: 1996 Platform: PlayStation Publisher: Namco **What's the game:** Three-dimensional polygon brawler (actually the game is essentially 2D, but it's set in a 3D world). **What's the big deal:** Tekken 2 is living proof that home console versions don't have to be strangled down from the arcade. When Namco converted Tekken 2 for PlayStation, it added so many new features that the home version is the preferable one. Besides the 20-plus playable characters, play control almost as responsive as Street Fighter 2's (not bad for a "3D" game), and special moves and combos too numerous to list, Tekken 2 adds a special combo practice mode, with the appropriate button combinations spooking across the bottom of the screen. Just one of Namco's very nice touches. **Memorable moments:** Finally putting together the perfect 10-hit combo.

21 Daytona USA

Released: 1994

Platform: Arcade

Publisher: Sega

What's the game: Multiplayer, texture-mapped, polygonal stock car racing over three courses. **What's the big deal:** Well, it's basically a lot like Virtua Racing, except that it features stock cars instead of F1 cars, and — thanks to Sega's Model 2 technology — texture-mapped graphics.

To really get the most out of Daytona, though, seek out an eight-player network version. It takes the realism of the game — and the satisfaction of winning — to a whole new level.

Memorable moments: The game is often accused of simply being a



"Try to go easy on the car," implies Daytona's pit coach.

showboat for Model 2's graphics power, and there are cosmetic "finishing touches" everywhere, most notably Sonic carved into the face of a cliff, and the spinning reels of a slot machine.

20 Sonic (series)

Released: 1991-1995

Platform: Genesis

Publisher: Sega

What's the game: Fast-paced side-scrolling platformer starring a hedgehog "with an attitude." **What's the big deal:** Those Super NES fans who still enjoy knocking Genesis will wince at this inclusion of Sonic The Hedgehog. "It's so shallow!" "There's no actual game!" "It's too short!" are just three of the accusations regularly leveled at Sega's 16-bit smash. But it's also fast, colorful, boasts fantastic level design, offers great control, and features one of the most compelling mascots ever seen.

Sonic is Sega's videogame. It is the zeitgeist of the 16-bit era, and spawned more imitations than even Mario himself. That isn't at all to say that Sonic is generic. Far from it. Sonic is as fun as a 16-bit game should be, and as original as a 16-bit videogame could hope to be.

It's really all about control. Sure, the graphics are great (and



Sonic is recognized by more children than Mickey Mouse.

levels like the Casino Night Zone, Green Hill Zone, and Aquatic Ruin Zone are easily the era's most memorable, but it's how Sonic plays that makes this series.

Nyu Naka (who went on to create *Nightd*) understands perfectly that it's how solid a game's controls is, and how sensitive the game is to a player's commands, that makes a great platform game. Sure, the central character's cuteness is an added bonus. But real "enthusie" is the result of confident gameplay — not some artist's imagination. Why do so many designers still not realize this? **Memorable moments:** The first time Sonic turns to you and starts stamping his feet.

19 Doom (series)

Released: 1993

Platform: Multiple

Publisher: id Software

What's the game: It's a lot like Doom, except... well... Actually it is Doom.

What's the big deal: For the benefit of readers who have been living in caves (as opposed to swaggering around them carrying heavy artillery), the big deal about Doom is that despite the hundreds of copycat titles, no one has ever been able to equal id's original, putting classic.

Sure, it only provides network support for four. Sure, by today's standards, the graphics look atrociously bad at 320x200. Sure, it isn't really 3D. So why, Quake aside, is it still the best?

We think it's the little details and the maniacal care with which it was programmed. An example: Run toward the edge of a doorway, aiming to run into the doorframe. Note how you actually slip through the door? This isn't a bug, it's a deliberate "fudging of the rules," by id to make maneuvering through the 3D world more forgiving. This enables players to more easily overcome themselves in the world. Most players don't notice these details, and yet, Doom is full of them.



It's Doom, the game that launched a thousand clones

Memorable moments: Doom 2's Tricks and Traps level when you finally realize you're not the only one killing those Banzai of Hell.

17 Final Fantasy (series)

Released: 1987-1995

Platform: NES, Super NES

Publisher: SquareSoft

What's the game: That unique and very special variety of game known as the "Japanese RPG." Turn-based combat and long, involved storylines combine for a game style that seemingly originates on no other continent. **What's the big deal:** Simple, no other series has ever done it better. Led by Hironobu Sakaguchi, the Final Fantasy design team is the world's best at what it does. Its games feature some of the most breathtaking graphics, superlative musical scores, and the most sprawling and highly melodramatic storylines ever conceived for a home game.

Lions of fans at home and abroad have made this series one of the most beloved in the world.



Square's Final Fantasy series is simply the best console RPG series ever, hands down

Memorable moments: There really isn't enough space to do the series justice, but there is one particular moment that can perhaps be safely named as the series' "great hour."

In Final Fantasy VII (released as part III in the U.S.), the half Esper sorceress Terra (who'd been brainwashed for years by the evil Kefka and has no emotions) learns to love again by caring for a village of orphaned children. The scene deals with issues of responsibility and trust, underscored by the plight of a pregnant teenager and her boyfriend who agonize over giving birth in a world on the brink of apocalypse. It's safe to say that no other game series has tackled such big issues, or reached such a level of emotional depth and complexity.

It truly is beautiful.

16 Populous (series)

Released: 1987-1992

Platform: PC, Genesis

Publisher: EA

What's the game: The original Populous was the original "God game," in which players fight against a human or computer opponent for a series of worlds by exerting their divine influence on their mortal subjects. As each player's flock of believers grows, so does his divine power, which he can use to inflict all manner of unpleasantness on his enemy. Earthquakes, volcanoes, floods, and plagues can all be rained down on those who oppose you, while the mortal armies fight for survival in this isometric clash of the titans.

What's the big deal: Well, aside from single-handedly creating a new genre overnight, Bullfrog's Populous is a great marriage of war-game strategy, resource management, and pure originality. Nowadays the ideas don't seem so new, but that's because they've been copied a trillion times. But back in 1989, this had never really been done before (and, some might argue, no one has ever really bettered Bullfrog's formula since).

Memorable moments: Any of the really big and juicy disasters. Like, for instance, the food which crops the entire landscape down one level into the water. Everything on high ground survives, everything else is consigned to the watery depths.

Micro Machines

Released: 1991

Platform: multiple

Publisher: CodeMasters

What's the game: Micro


Machines is a 2D, top-down, two-player racing game based on the popular kids' toys. The object of the game is to race the opponent around a series of makeshift miniature race courses (a pool table, a breakfast bar, a garden, etc.) in a series of miniature cars. A player loses a point when his opponent gets so far ahead that the screen isn't big enough to show both players.

What's the big deal: Heart-pounding, adrenaline-pumping action is often found in the most unlikely places — and Micro Machines is one such place. In fact, it has excitement by the bucket. The control is perfect (again, it's the Street Fighter 2 theory: when you don't have to worry about push 3D graphics, you can devote all the computer's attention to providing superb control and split-second reaction times), and the game is balanced to perfection.

Micro Machines is the Super Bomberman 2 of the racing world, and we can't offer much higher praise than that. **Memorable moments:** Knocking your opponent's toy speedboat into the whirlpool in the bath.



Yes, the graphics are simple. Yes, all you're doing is racing around a toy track. But who cares? Perfectly balanced, with dead-on control, Micro Machines is simple, pure fun



Psychologists say inside every
18 to 35-year-old male, there lies
a potential psychotic killer.

14 Elite

Released: 1982

Platform: BBC Micro, C64

Publisher: Firebird

What's the game: A wire-frame 3D, space-shooting/training game in which players import and export various goods between planets to earn more money to buy more stuff for their ship. And that, really, is about it.

What's the big deal: In 1982 games were either shoot-'em-ups or, frankly, primitive text adventures. David Braben's *Elite* changed all that for good. It was one of the very first games to feature 3D graphics, but more importantly, it challenged the definition of what a computer game was. *Elite* was a sprawling epic involving strategy, thought, spoofing, but relatively little shooting and very little text. It was a complete universe built in an 8-bit world.

There are at least two members of *Next Generation's* editorial staff who believe *Elite* is still possibly the greatest computer game ever created. At the time, however, many software houses found it too challenging. It was turned down more than once because there were no lives to be lost, no score, and no obvious start, middle, or end.

It was eventually released by an offshoot of the U.K.'s major telephone company, British Telecom, on a long-forgotten machine called the BBC Micro. It was critically acclaimed from day one. It's since been reissued on 16-bit platforms (not as good as

the original) and sold around 1 million copies.

Elite is the seminal example of a game that with no story, no motives, and no personalities — your character doesn't even have a name — still manages to immerse players perhaps more than any other game before or since. The dark emptiness of space is filled only with stark space stations, suns, fellow pirates, harmless traders, and — inevitably — the police ("Have you been smuggling any narcotics recently?"). And yet the potential players have within this world to carve out their own existence in huge. Do players risk the attention of the police by making easy money playing outside space stations, lurking on peaceful traders as they enter and leave? If so, they can even use fuel scoops — an optional extra, costing 400 credits — to pick up their victim's escape pod as he ejects from his crippled craft, and then sell the unfortunate crew on as slaves? Or do players buy some top-grade military lasers and simply adopt the role of deep space highwayman? Or do they trade legal goods from planet to planet legitimately? Do players simply buy a mining laser and eke out a space hermit's living blowing up asteroids, and then selling the ore?

The beauty is that it doesn't matter. We love this game. **Memorable moments:** Without any fanfare, as kills tally up and the player's skills increase, he or her pilot rating reaches "Elite."

13 Defender

Released: 1981

Platform: Arcade

Publisher: Williams

What's the game: "Defend" humans on a planet surface by destroying alien ships attempting to abduct and then mutate them.



Defender's attract mode was programmed in just five hours.

What's the big deal: At a 1981 Chicago arcade machine tradeshow, *Defender* was judged to be a flop. It was deemed to be too complicated, just as that stupid game *Pac-Man* was deemed too easy. (Really it was viewed as the next big thing.)

But history had different priorities in mind, and *Defender's* complexity ended up being its trump card. Its difficulty somehow manages to keep players coming back for more, as opposed to putting them off (the average game time in its first week was less than 30 seconds) and it's been popular ever since. What is truly great about

Defender, however, is the play balancing. Designer Eugene Jarvis (see page 6) spent months getting the balance of user power to enemy difficulty just right. The result is a total adrenaline rush.

Jarvis estimates that worldwide, *Defender* coin-ups have consumed more than a billion quarters. And counting. **Memorable moments:** Kids playing for 24 hours straight (and having to save up a bunch of extra lives for a bathroom run).

12 Ms. Pac-Man

Released: 1981

Platform: Arcade

Publisher: Midway/Nemco

What's the game: Guide a yellow (female) circle around a maze, eating all of the dots for points. Alternatively chase ghosts. And be chased by ghosts (It's a yin and yang thing, probably).

What's the big deal: *Pac-Man* may have been the original, but play it today and you'll realize what a boring, repetitive game it really is. Not so with *Ms. Pac-Man*, which features smarter ghost AI, a variety of mazes, moving fruits, and — to ease that aching head — intermissions.

Whether you're in a bar, an arcade, on a date, or in your neighbor's rec room, there is always time for a game of *Ms. Pac-Man*. It has the broadest appeal of any game *Next Generation* has seen, with the possible exception of Tetris. Women love it. Men love it. Children love it. Play it 20 times in a night or once in five years, and it retains all the fun it ever had. If anything, compared to most of today's overblown arcade offerings, it's better than it was when it was released.

Memorable moments: Junior, Second Junior, Third Junior...

11 Virtua Racing

Released: 1982

Platform: Arcade, 32X, Saturn

Publisher: Sega

What's the game: Multiplayer, polygonal, F1-style racing game.

What's the big deal: Yup, we rate *Virtua Racing* higher than either *Sega Rally* or *Daytons USA*, and



Unfettered by lectures, *Virtua Racing* delivers pure power.

Marble Madness

Released: 1984

Platform: Arcade

Publisher: Atari

What's the game: Maneuver a marble through a series of mazes, racing against the clock. The two-player version adds a great extra element to the gameplay, as two marbles fight to complete the same course in the shortest time. Knock your opponent off the course, and he's transported back out, but only after suffering a time penalty.

What's the big deal: Designed and programmed by a 17-year-old (Marc Cermy, who went on to produce the decidedly less innovative *Crash Sandcooper* for Universal), *Marble Madness's* trackball control elevates it to greatness. Sure, the graphics are superb, but essentially what's really cool is steering a marble around. It's flat out fun.

The Genesis conversion was cool, but ultimately the *Marble Madness* experience just doesn't happen with a joypad. This — like *Daytons USA* and *Star Wars Arcade* — is a game that has to be played in the arcade to be appreciated. To a certain extent, *Marble Madness* is here representing all trackball videogames (Arcade Conversion is awesome, too). **Memorable moments:** The "kewps" on the floor.

Marble Madness marked what is still the high-water mark for trackball-controlled games.





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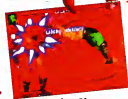
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a potential psychotic killer.

here's why — it drives better.

Despite the game's lack of texture maps, this is the best racing game on the planet.

Memorable moments: Progressing from hell-ram to the in-the-cockpit view. And, of course, the pit crew.

10 WarCraft II

Released: 1995

Platform: PC

Publisher: Blizzard

What's the game: As the (immeasurably superior) sequel to the original WarCraft, once again orcs and humans are battling for supremacy in this strategy war game. Spell-casting wizards, fire-breathing dragons, batticalahs, catapults, suicidal demolition squads, elite archers, gold miners, towers, armed troops, and really, really stupid ponies are among the resources players must acquire and manage to defeat the enemy.

What's the big deal: A great single-player game, WarCraft II is



Once battle tactics for world supremacy in WarCraft II

elevated to classic status by the awesome multiplayer features in which up to eight human commanders can participate in the same scenario. Either have each army battle by itself, or team up (and alliances can always be changed midgame) for an allied assault. Either way, players see in for a treat.

The strategy is complex, the classy VGA graphics keep the player in touch with everything that's going on, and WarCraft II features the best use of sampled speech we've ever experienced.

It's impossible not to get caught up in this utterly absorbing world of medieval fantasy warfare.

Memorable moments: Using the wizards to turn the enemy's most powerful units into bleating sheep is always good for a laugh.

8 Lemmings

Released: 1991

Platform: Multiple

Publisher: Psygnosis

What's the game: At its time of release, Lemmings was like no

other game seen before. At first, many gamers had no idea how to play it. But they soon learned.

Each level provides the player with a 2D cross-section view of a miniature world. In each world, players quickly see an entrance, an exit, separated by a vast array of traps, walls, and fatal drops.

Next, the entrance opens and out marches a procession of goofy, little green lemmings (who — as we all know — are famous for leaping off cliffs to their deaths). These guys will then start exploring the level on their own accord, but without any thought to their own personal safety. It's the player's job to make sure that enough lemmings make it safely to the exit (players are told at the start of each level how many must be saved). In order to complete the level.

To do this, players allocate various roles to select lemmings. For example, if all the lemmings are happily walking along a platform that ends in a fatal drop, players can "tell" the first lemming to stop. He'll then immediately halt, raise his little lemming paw to tell all the other lemmings not to walk any further, they'll all listen to him, and walk back the other way.

Other roles include miners, diggers, parachutists, rock climbers, and bridge builders. And using a combination of all of these is the only way to succeed.

What's the big deal: Now, all that exploration may not sound so hot, but trust us — wait until you try it. Second only to Tetris, Lemmings is the most addictive puzzle game of all time. And although it's often imitated (Worms and Humans, to name just two), DMA Designs' original design has never been bettered. **Memorable moments:** The little lemming scream of "Oh no!" just before one blows up.

7 Street Fighter 2 (series)

Released: 1991

Platform: Multiple

Publisher: Capcom

What's the game: 2D fighting. **What's the big deal:** Despite the many knockoffs Next Generation has given 2D fighters over the past two years ("If it ain't broke, don't fix it" is not an attitude that leads to progress), and despite our fatigue with the number of cookie-cutter SF2 clones all out there, the original is still one of the greatest games of all. (Um, the seventh greatest game, to be precise.)

It's all about control and depth. And SF2 has both by the bucketload. No game has ever offered players such a range of

Quake provides a graphic and technological update to its classic Doom, with tactics by Trent Reznor

Released: 1996
Platform: PC
Publisher: id Software
What's the game: Quake is a multiplayer, first-person, 3D shooter that comes fully loaded with the hottest implementation of real-time 3D graphics known how as it exists today.

Many gamers won't notice, but as opposed to Doom, Quake boasts a true, 3D polygon world, and polygons, 3D meshes by the score. This enables such features as walking down slopes, under walkways, and looking up and down. Id also added a jump option to the mix.

What's the big deal: Quake is an evolution of the Doom idea in more ways than one: not only does it deliver a satisfying single-player experience full of creepy tension, but best of all, up to eight players can shoot each other to bits over a network. Otherwise, sure, it's essentially just more of the same, but gamers were demanding more — and Id has delivered, and once again moved the goalposts for its imitators.

Doom's "Death Match" mode entered the retrogame vocabulary as the generic term for a multiplayer free-for-all, and for good reason — it was great fun. And Quake's multiplayer mode is even better than Doom's.

Memorable moments: It's undeniable penchant for lightning, satanic imagery never fails to shock, but the real killer in Quake has to be nearly drowning in an underground lake.



Street Fighter II still has some of the deepest gameplay ever

6 Virtua Fighter 2

Released: 1994

Platform: Arcade, Saturn

Publisher: Sega

What's the game: A two-player fighter based on a startling range of martial arts styles. Success playing Virtua Fighter 2 depends entirely on a player's skill, reaction time, and experience — not on secret combinations, codes, or rote memory moves. **What's the big deal:** Sega AM2's original Virtua Fighter was a breakthrough in almost every category, and Virtua Fighter 2 built enormously on these foundations. As an arcade game, it boasts scores of complex moves and combinations with only a three-button configuration, simultaneously enabling both an ease of use and incredible depth beyond that of other fighters.

Each of the colorful fighting characters are designed around realistic physics and motion-captured human movement. The finished 3D polygon, texture-mapped characters are integrated

options, and then provided such a number of permutations and combinations of their use. No game has ever felt so "robust" in terms of cause and effect, and no game has ever honed its core essence to such perfection.

This is another game that all budding game designers should be forced to play.

Memorable moments: Your first successful execution of a Dragon Punch at an inordinate opponent.



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By adding 3D to SFII's formula, Sega added the osts for players

seamlessly into a cohesive game world. But it's the differentiation in the characters' fighting styles that makes this game such a classic. Lau, for example, fights completely differently from Jacky, or Jeffry, or Pat, and so players are required to learn how to fight differently against each new opponent. This adds tremendous depth and endless gameplay value to the title.

Perhaps Virtua Fighter 2's greatest achievement is its successful translation of state-of-the-art 2D gameplay (see Street Fighter 2) to the 3D world. The original Virtua Fighter didn't quite manage to re-create the pacing and fluidity of Capcom's finest, but Sega's model 2 board enabled Virtua Fighter 2 to manage it with clock cycles to spare — despite its heavy graphic burden. Never have 300,000 polygons per second moved so well together.

Indeed, VF2 is still one of the best-looking games in the arcades or in the home, and it has remained high on the arcade charts since it first hit in December 1994. Up until the release of Super Mario 64, Virtua Fighter 2 was still the biggest game in Japan, despite it being almost three years old. And the title is pretty much single-handedly responsible for Saturn's success in its home country.

Perhaps the only threat to Virtua Fighter 2's reign as king of the fighters is the prospect of Virtua Fighter 3. In anticipation of this Model 3 board-powered launch this fall, Sega has already started licensing out the highly-desired Model 2 technology to third parties.

Memorable moments: There are many: 1) Working with Shun-Do; Yu Suzuki incorporated a certain drinking habit of Shun's into the game, and with every sip out of his little wine bottle, Shun-Do becomes able to perform a new, alcohol-fueled move. 2) Discovering the codes for entering into Dural's stage. 3) Being told by the delectable

Sarah that you'd "better run home to mamma now."

5 Mario (series)

Released: 1985-1991

Platform: NES, Super NES, Game Boy

Publisher: Nintendo

What's the game: Slow-paced, side-scrolling platform starring a pudgy Italian plumber who's trying to save a princess.

What's the big deal: In a way, despite the comparisons that are

always drawn between them, Super Mario has very little in common with Sonic the Hedgehog. Mario moves slower, the graphics are more stouthead than hip, and the exhilarating lure of adventure is favored over the heady excitement of Sonic's sheer speed. What really sets the two series apart though, is Shigeru Miyamoto and the rest of Nintendo's Mario team's amazing sense for exactly what works and what doesn't in a videogame. The

levels in all of Mario's adventures are so perfectly designed that there are very few gamers who can look at them and not see sheer brilliance.

The sense of exploration one gets when sinking down a pipe, or climbing a vine to the top of the clouds is simply unbeatable, and it's this sense of discovery one gets with Mario that makes the games rank so high on this list. The trademark cutesy graphics also have their own appeal, as does the incredibly catchy music. It's not for everyone's taste, certainly, but for those gamers who are trapped in Mario's spell (and there are millions of us), Mario's 8-bit and 16-bit adventures can still thrill, excite, and surprise.

To anyone who has a Super NES or NES and a Mario cart gathering dust in a drawer, Next Generation heartily recommends cleaning them off and taking them out for another spin. You won't be disappointed.

Memorable moments: Flying

4 Civilization (series)

Released: 1994-1996

Platform: PC

Publisher: MicroProse

What's the game: The description may not sound like much — a turn-based, top-down strategy game with bland graphics consisting of nothing more than small colored squares moving around on a map — but Civilization is a classic example



Civilization is one of the most engrossing games we've played



It's cute, it's little, but Super Bomberman 2 is, without a doubt, the finest multiplayer game yet

your opponents — list one standing is the winner. Power-ups increase the size of the bombs' explosion, the number of bombs that can be dropped onscreen at any one time, and the bomber's speed. They enable players also to place bombs placed by themselves or other players, and — perhaps most importantly — pick up bombs and throw them. Each round lasts one, two, or three minutes — after which point the game is considered a draw, if more than one player is still alive. All players re-enter the arena and try again.

What's the big deal: What can we say? Super Bomberman 2 really takes the award of most-played game in the Next Generation offices. For two hours, every day, every week — Super Bomberman 2 is casting its spell over a wider and wider audience. Of course, all the writers play. But so do all the artists. And all the guys who sell advertising space (they're actually quite good). And the cleaners. And the administration assistants. And so on...

The trick is that Super Bomberman 2 optimizes the Japanese art of taking a ludicrously simple concept, and then executing that concept faultlessly. The control is superb, the graphics are ultimately functional (if not oddly cute), the play is balanced to perfection — and four players won't have more fun doing anything else. We mean it, Warcraft 2, Quake, Daytona USA — they're all great multiplayer games. But Super Bomberman 2 is better.

Memorable moments: You're trapped in a corner with no way out. Bombs (which will explode at any second) surround you. The pink bomberman (you can choose the color of your character) who trapped you is gleefully scuttling away to safety. With one, final, desperate breath, you hold one last bomb toward the opponent. It hits him, stuns him for a split second, and gets caught in a chain reaction of flame from the bombs that just exploded around you. You're still dead, but you took your murderer with you.



What's the big deal: Controlling the fate of humanity throughout the course of history, that's the big deal. Civilization 2's improved graphics and user interface merely compounded Civilization's status as the deepest, most rewarding PC game of all time. **Memorable moments:** Defeating France. Always a crowd pleaser.

2 Tetris
Released: 1987


Platform: Multiple
Publisher: Nintendo, Spectrum Holobyte, many others
What's the game: Position blocks dropping down a well to create

horizontal lines without gaps. **What's the big deal:** It takes about five seconds to learn how to play Tetris, and the rest of your life to perfect it.

There is something so perfect, so Zen about the falling blocks of Tetris that the game has captured the interest of everyone who has ever played it. Businessmen, housewives, hardcore gamers — all have become addicted. Dreaming Tetris blocks is not an uncommon symptom of the afflicted, and mentally rearranging furniture or buildings into lines is to be expected. Tetris really is the closest to

videogaming perfection that anyone has ever come. Sure, it doesn't attempt much in terms of graphics or variety, but this is simply another of its strengths — it plays as good on the Game Boy as on any other system.

Although mathematician-cum-game-designer Alexey Pajitnov's subsequent efforts have fallen short of Tetris, this is not surprising. It is difficult to top what many people still consider the most pure game ever devised.

Memorable moments: Next Generation shipping late because two editors wasted so much time on Tetris challenges. 



Tetris: the single most addictive (and pirated) game of all time



Super Mario 64
Released: 1996
Platform: Nintendo 64
Publisher: Nintendo

What's the game: Mario takes to the 3D world for his first 64-bit adventure.

What's the big deal: Super Mario 64 is the first true 3D game to play as good as the 2D games of the 16-bit era. (Virtua Fighter 2 almost succeeded, but it's not really 3D.) As such, it represents the new high-water mark of both gameplay and graphic sophistication. The game arrived at the Next Generation offices on June 23, the day of Nintendo 64's launch in Japan, and we started playing. Thirty-six hours later (no, we didn't sleep), we'd completed it with 75 rings. Except, of course, that completing the game with 75 rings isn't really completing the game at all. The eventual goal of completing with all the rings (there are at least 120) still evades us.

If Tetris is the parent, narrowest, most complete videogame ever created, then Super Mario 64 is the exact opposite. This is an entire 3D world, just waiting to be explored. This is a creation of genius.

Plenty has been written about Super Mario 64, while most U.S. gamers have yet to experience the game for themselves. This will all change on September 30, however, as Nintendo 64 officially launches in the U.S. In the meantime, we'll just let the screen-shots speak for themselves — just remember that this is one of those beautiful but all too rare occasions where the game plays every single bit as good as it looks.

Memorable moments: All of it. We're serious.

Super Mario 64 is the second coming (if you will) of videogames, and the fun of exploring has never been so fantastical and whimsical. For an exclusive in-depth look at Super Mario 64, check out NG 20's 11-page preview. What can we say that hasn't been said already? As you work your way through the game, you'll encounter puzzles and game elements beyond your wildest expectations, only to have it surprise itself as you explore later courses. If you don't love this you don't love videogames.

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this fully-rendered role-playing game! • It's the best of both worlds. One minute you're neck and neck at the Yoshi Races. The next you're gambling the night away at the

Grate Guy's Casino. And, in between, you'll have to test your brains on mind-

mushing riddles and new action-

puzzles. Of course

you'll find plenty of

new friends who

can help out. But

they'll need your help

Jumping, ducking and dodging

have always been a critical

part of any button-

bashing Mario



heroic plumber will have to battle through all the twists, turns and thumb-numbing action of a clas-

sic Mario adventure. Plus, meet

the mental challenge

as the story unfolds in

You want a new kind of Mario action? Try the Yoshi races. But here's a tip. If you don't hit the buttons to the beat, you'll get beat.



Finding Froggicus is a wise move if you want to know more about your future quest.

in return. Without you, Mallow

will never find his true family.

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you'll also

need plenty of

brains to finish.



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Once the sole province of corporate logos, CG (Computer Graphics) imagery has come to be an artistic form in its own right, exploring every facet of the human condition, and perhaps more importantly, creating worlds anew. **Next Generation** salutes the work of 3D artists...

g a l l e r y

Worth a thousand words



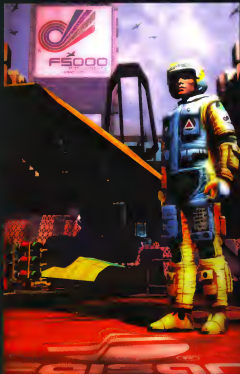
The startling range of what CG imagery is capable of is demonstrated by this line of works. The Bitmap Brothers' *Z* exemplifies strong character work and subtle visual humor (above). *Panzer Dragoon Zwei* shows an unprecedented level of detail and strongly consistent fantasy design clearly inspired by the work of French artist Jean "Mochius" Grand (top right). A CG flea (that's right, it's not real) created in *Saffinago* for *City of Lost Children*, digitally composited to a live shot of a fingertip (right).



Z by Chris Tomson and Tony Galton using 3D Studio.

Panzer Dragoon Zwei by Yoshinori Kusanagi (3D graphics), Takao Takatori (CG director), and Kazuhiko Sato (setting) on SGI using Softimage.

Flea for *City of Lost Children* by Raf Compaogno using Softimage.



Deliberately cartoon-like, but showing a brilliant sense of mood in *Heart of Darkness* from French design house Amazing Studios. Amazing's lead Eric Chabé: "We didn't want that computer graphic look — you know the kind of thing, high-tech spaceships, etc" (top left). In a similar vein is Sony Music Corporation's Rowless's *Goth*, an ambitious project featuring 100% pre-rendered graphics and a decidedly Japanese approach to character design (above). Stunning artwork for PlayStation's *Wipeout XL* by Jim Bowers. A toy *Action Man* figure was enhanced with modeling plastic and digitized with a 3D scanner. The face was lifted from a commercial 3D library, while the helmet was "built" from scratch. The background was then modeled and rendered separately, and the two elements were composited in a 2D paint program — the last step, oddly, took longest (left)

Heart of Darkness by Fabrice Vignard, Jerome Coumbis, Patrick Duber and Stephen Remarke using 3D Studio

Action Man's Goth by Patrick Simons using SoftImage

Wipeout XL by Jim Bowers on MGI using SoftImage

viewing



Ferocious work from Ocean for *Breadthought*, mixing Victorian design with tanks and planes on a Martian landscape (don't ask). Fire, smoke and even lens flare add a dash of realism to the admittedly absurd concept (above). Digital Domain used Softimage's particle generator for this fire-breathing tiger's intimidating pose (top right). Another superior Jim Swears image for *Peytonplace*'s *Krazy Ivan*. Aside from being a perfectly balanced image, the careful attention to detail asks what could have been little more than an ersatz *Robotech* image in a realistically battle-worn example of military gear (right).



Breadthought by "July" of Ocean Software on 64i using *PowerAnimator*

Tiger by Digital Domain using *SoftImage*

Krazy Ivan by Jim Swears on 64i using *SoftImage*

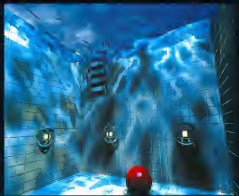
Energy Zero by the Tanabiki (CG director), Fumiko Ueda, Masahito Sugawara (CG assistant), Etsuro Miyashita, and Takahiko Miyashita (modeling/texturing) on SGI using ProRender/Render

City of Lost Children by "Bul Computer" using SoftImage

Little Big Adventure 2 by Frederic Touquet using SoftImage



Warp showed an excellent sense of mood and pulled off startling realistic character expression for its First Game. D — all the more impressive for having been mastered using off-the-shelf software running on Amiga 2000s. The company's factories have improved, and its next effort, Energy Zero (SD in Japan) is rendered entirely on SGI workstations (top left). Adeline's work for its upcoming game, Little Big Adventure 2, showcases the French production for splashy color and finely detailed architectural design (above). Another City of Lost Children wrap, showing off SoftImage's lighting filters (left)



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Ultima Online **PC, Mac** Turok: Dinosaur Hunter **Nintendo 64** Tiger Shark **PC, PlayStation** Diehard **Arcade** Mechwarrior: Mercenaries **PC** Fighting Vipers **Saturn** Interplay **Multi** Interactive Magic **Multi**



Previews like Mom used to make

If the future of PC gaming is online, Origin is carving out a big chunk of virtual real estate with *Ultima Online*, the most ambitious network project ever. The full story begins on page 74. Also, while many third-party Nintendo 64 titles look underwhelming, there is one bright spot, *Turok: Dinosaur Hunter*. For exclusive pictures, check page 90. And look for a pair of company profiles, the first from one of the industry's more quirky outfits, Interactive Magic, and the other, one of the industry's most prolific, Interplay.

84 *Ultima Online* **PC, MAC**

Lord British is alive and well and living in cyberspace — at least for now.

87 *Tiger Shark* **PC, PLAYSTATION**

One of the first games built specifically for Intel's new MMX CPU is coming.

90 *Turok* **NINTENDO 64**

Could it be true? Is Acclaim ready to release a good licensed game?

92 *Diehard* **ARCADE**

Sega's hopeful killer app for its Titan board is the first *Final Fight*-style game in 3D.

96 *Mercenaries* **PC CD-ROM**

The latest in the *Mechwarrior* series takes a journey back in the *BattleTech* universe.

98 *Fighting Vipers* **SATURN**

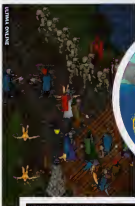
AM2 pulls every trick out of the book for its home conversion of the arcade smash.

104 *Interplay* **MULTI**

President Brian Fargo talks about one of the industry's largest publishers.

109 *Interactive Magic* **MULTI**

A company known as much for its colorful president as its line of quality sims.



ng alphas



Although still in the early stages, these screens (taken during *Ultima's* alpha testing in May) give a good indication of the basic *Ultima* mechanics: pop-up item menus, conversation bars, and user-definable character icons. The cities (left) are places of civilization and safety, where in the wilderness outside (right) anything goes.



Ultima Online

Format: **Macintosh,**

PC CD-ROM

Publisher: **Electronic Arts**

Developer: **Origin**

Release Date: **November**

Origin: **U.S.**

Origin plans the most ambitious online project ever attempted — a totally self-contained world for you and 2,000 of your Internet buddies to indulge in

The road to online gaming is paved with good intentions, halfway measures, and spectacular failures. However, few can boast the kind of sweeping, comprehensive scope of Origin's *Ultima Online*. "This is really the first time Origin can say we're living up to our slogan: 'We create worlds,'" says Starr Long, *Ultima's* associate producer. "The goal is to create a fully functioning virtual world, and by that I mean we'll have a virtual ecology, a closed economic system, a resource system, a dynamic conversation pool, almost everything you'd expect from a real world, and all these things will be linked together."

Ultima Online works via the usual TCP/IP client-server protocol,



much like an Internet browser, only more involved. After dialing your local access provider and connecting to the *Ultima* site, the game runs on your home computer. Packets of information — conversational text, location, character status, etc. — are then sent



The key to the site is interaction, either conversation or battle



Deeper in the wilderness, expect even more dangerous places to go



Hazards aren't limited to other adventurers. In the final version, all manner of strange beasts can be found — hey, something has to be responsible for that huge pile of bodies

"The Ultima environment is supposed to be as much a social thing as a way to go on adventures"

Steve Long, Ultima executive producer



A steinmet group fights off a tribe of, um, really evil things. This is the goal of the system, to let groups of online buddies get together and follow their own destinies

back and forth between your own PC and the Ultima server, each updating the other. "It's a little strange," Long admits. "If you watch two people playing on different machines side-by-side and they're walking together down a corridor, each will seem to be a little ahead of the other. But during our alpha testing in May, we had people participating from as far away as Brazil and Taiwan, with latency of 500 milliseconds or more, and it never interfered with the experience. They barely noticed."

Players can choose from many different types of characters, and customize them from a set list of body types, faces, and clothing. The game is set in the fantasy-based *Ultima* universe, seen from an isometric perspective, and the world holds 16 different cities, each with a different architectural style. Within the cities, order is maintained by a cadre of NPC guards, who immediately pounce on anyone who attacks someone else. Outside the cities, however, anarchy reigns. To avoid the "beat-on-the-Newbie" syndrome that affects some online games, the *Ultima* character system is skill, rather than level, based.

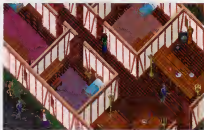
"In the traditional RPG rule set, you eventually have characters who hit level 100 and become like gods," Long explains. "But we never want to have that happen. There's never going to be a point where a person becomes so powerful they can just point their finger and kill someone. Instead, we have a skill-based system, where you can choose certain skills based on a set list, and if you use that skill, you get better at it, even very good, but no one will ever get so powerful that they can do away with everyone without a second thought. The world is more dynamic and flexible that way, since it means actions involve real risks and consequences."

Perhaps the single most impressive thing about *Ultima Online*, however, is the otherwise total lack of structure. Anything goes. Of course, there are system-supplied quests to undertake — villages to save from dragons, fabulous items to retrieve for a Lord or Lady, etc. — but in a very real sense, the world is what you make of it. One of the more interesting results of *Ultima's* alpha testing in May of this year was that when you have several hundred people in one place at one time, they tend to form their own microsocieties. At press time, even without *Ultima* ever being officially online, there are already

some two dozen player-created "guilds." For example, when Richard Garratt signed online as his alter-ego, Lord British, two groups sprung up: one, the Dragon Liberation Front, which immediately pledged itself to destroying him, and the other, aptly named Protectors of Virtue & Lord British. Threats were made, battles were joined, and a fine time was had by all.

"The system is so open ended that, if you want, sure you can do all the traditional role-playing stuff, but if you don't want to, you can be a bartender, run a tavern, and merely talk with people," says Long. "There's also a guild of bards who just want to follow adventurers around and write songs and poems about them. If all you want to do is just meet in a tavern with a friend who lives hundreds of miles away for virtual ale and conversation, you can do it," Long concludes. "The environment is supposed to be as much a social thing as a way to go on adventures."

ng



The *Ultima Online* world is huge. It takes hours to cross one city on foot, and there are 16 cities, plus large, complex areas around them

NFL Quarterback Club '97

Acclaim's NFL Quarterback Club '97 is living proof that a serious football-gaming engine is not made in a day but evolves over time.



(top) weather conditions affect player movement and field deterioration. (right) all new player animations include QB slides, laterals and diving.



Offensively & defensively, the plays are deep and accurate and the control is intuitive.



Format: Sony PlayStation™, Sega Saturn™, DOS CD-ROM

Publisher: Acclaim

Origin: U.S.

Release Date: August 29



(top) evaluate key personnel and team strengths. (middle) make that blockbuster deal of a lifetime. (bottom) redesigned playbooks feature 500 new plays.

It's no longer enough to throw a football game out into the marketplace with just an NFL license and the basic plays to keep it warm. The level of competition out there requires a multi-faceted game which does everything in detail and does it well. For several years Acclaim has renovated, refined and retaunched their football franchise and their hard work has paid off with a solid gold game. From its pumped-up gameplay down to the clearly visible numbers on the players' shirts, NFL Quarterback Club '97 is staking its claim as the outstanding football contender this fall. Most significant is QB Club's radically souped-up A.I. which learns your coaching style and play-calling tendencies to deny you cheap yardage with the same predictable play. 500 new plays add unparalleled

depth to the gameplay as do 30 new scenarios where you can play out memorable finishes from NFL history. The graphics are first-rate: the new 3-D rendered stadiums are striking and the crisp, realistic animations from laterals to QB slides display the benefits of motion-capture technology at its best. Purists will be hard-pressed to find faults. Comprehensive stats now track complete player and team statistics by game and for the entire season. You can substitute any player at any position or trade between teams. And there's candy, too -- a showboating selection of spikes and highsteps, and for the code-junkies a bonanza of hidden teams. With killer graphics, CD-quality sound effects and gameplay that consistently surprises and delights, the new football season will see NFL Quarterback Club '97 establish itself as the prime-time favorite of pro football gaming.

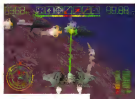


player sprites feature helmet logos, uniform numbers and nameplates.

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Available
August 29

GT Interactive and developer N-Space make the head-first jump into Intel's new MMX standard with an undersea shooter



A sample of Tiger Shark's MMX-boostered gameplay

Tiger Shark, a 3D shooter set under the Pacific in the war-torn world of 2064, is being designed by N-Space from the ground up for use with Intel's new game-friendly MMX CPU standard. MMX enhancements affect a game's speed more than anything else, and this boost creates greater detail, more colors, and more precise control, all of which are features N-Space hopes Tiger Shark will boost.

Although the structure and backstory is familiar — a lone prototype sub fighter battles against the odds to halt the destruction of the Earth — the game

Tiger Shark

Format: **PC-CD ROM, PlayStation**

Publisher: **GT Interactive**

Developer: **N-Space**

Release Date: **fall**

Origin: **U.S.**

works fine for an attack submarine simulation that aims to be an underwater version of *Descent*. And with an MMX boost, that could be formidable, indeed.



A 3D shooter with extra speed and detail — looks fine

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ng alphas

Turok



The fire-breathing T-Rex, built from more than 4,200 polygons, may be one of the most impressive bosses ever (note the head-mounted laser sight)



Turok's environments are nicely varied, showing off N64's graphic capabilities

While the vast majority of Nintendo 64 third-party games are generally proving to be disappointments, there is at least one bright spot. Acclaim, who bought Valiant comics some years ago and has been looking for ways to exploit its licenses ever since, has chosen Turok (an obscure Gold Key series from the '70s later revamped for the '90s), to star in its first 64-bit title.

And, guess what — it looks like it's gonna kick some serious ass.

"Turok encompasses almost everything you could want as far as elements to put into a game," explains David Dienstbier, the title's project manager. The game evolved as a first-person shooter, using N64's analog stick to control direction (including looking up and down), while the four-way direction buttons control motion.

The finished game will feature nine levels, each of which is as large as the product's 8 MB cart will allow. "We're breaking away from the 'oh yeah, we've got 20 levels, but level 20 looks



Turok begs the question: why are other third-party titles so lackluster?

Iguana Entertainment and Acclaim (yes, Acclaim) take an obscure comic-book character and come up with the most impressive third-party N64 title yet

Format: **Nintendo 64**
 Publisher: **Acclaim**
 Developer: **Iguana**
 Release Date: **fall**
 Origin: **U.S.**

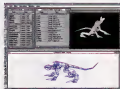


This early sketch shows just how close the finished product is to the design team's laudible, ambitious ideas. "The hardware does everything we'd hoped it would," claims Project Manager David Dienstbier

just like level three except it's blue," theory of design."

In fact, the Iguana team fields a total of nine full-time artists in various capacities, including four animators, two texture artists, and two for motion-capture editing and particle-system animation.

This may go a long way toward explaining just why Turok is such a standout. "These guys are really into what they're doing. The guys doing our particle stuff will spend a whole weekend redoing an effect everyone already thought looked great, and you come in on Monday and go 'Man! Look what you guys did!' So you have a really enthusiastic team of very talented people who are just willing to do whatever it takes to make this game look better than anything else. It makes a big difference."



Iguana designed most of its own development tools, with an eye toward creating future Nintendo 64 projects



ng alphas

Diehard



While the look is three-dimensional, the fighting is not. **BIBB**, hand combat (left) has never been so fun in a game like this

Format: **Arcade**
 Publisher: **Sega**
 Developer: **Sega**
 Release Date: **available now**
 Origin: **Japan**

Diehard (Dynamite Cop in Japan) demonstrates that decent games can be developed for Sega Saturn's arcade twin

Some might say the Titan arcade system software line-up looks a little thin these days. Up until now, the only games that have really turned heads were *Virtua Fighter Remix* and, well, the novel but ultimately less than gripping *Funky Head Boxers*. In other words, it seemed as if the low-cost system didn't spark enough of an interest from developers, in-house, or third-party, to spend much time with it.

So when *Diehard* (a working title) landed on the marketing department's doorstep, the folks at Sega took notice. *Diehard* is the first texture-mapped, polygonal *Final Fight*-style action game, and it clearly demonstrates that decent games can, in fact, be developed for the limping, arcade-twin of Sega Saturn.

Based loosely on the Bruce Willis-movie series, *Diehard* is a two-player, isometric-view action-fighter in which the President's daughter has been kidnapped and your characters must save her from the Japanese terrorists

The long, slow wait for developers to finally make a killer app for Saturn's arcade twin may have finally arrived

who've stolen and, subsequently, lost her. The game takes the classic 2D action genre into the next realm of depth and playability with an extensive weapon selection, a dirty band of enemy AI, and satisfying fighting moves. Hand guns, axes, and rifles all seem fairly typical fare, but the more unusual anti-aircraft missile launchers and spray-cans lit with matches can turn enemy AI into serious toast (and, of course, characters can pick up various pieces of furniture, nearby oil cans, etc.). Each weapon causes degrees of reaction from the enemies as well: They react to the spray can by covering their eyes and howling, and the big guns blow terrorist scum across the room with a weighty bounce.

Without any weapons at hand, your characters are capable of moves not found in other fighting games. Leap on top of a character, dig your knees into his arms, and punch his face in four or five times, land a head butt, kick him in the groin (and watch him bend over and wince in pain), or perform a leaping kick into his face. Many of the moves are easily executable with only a little *Virtua Fighter* playing experience.

Fighting still takes place on a single plane, permitting attacks and defense from only the left or right — so in a real sense, this is still a 2D game, and that's disappointing. Also, the cinematic scenes in between levels enable you to watch an action scene and punch, kick, or jump at the appropriate time to deck a bad guy or avoid a fire truck. These scenes initially seem cool, until players realize how little interaction occurs.

At the time of this writing, the game was about 90% complete, with developers cleaning up nasty clipping problems, and putting final touches on character movement and moves. *Diehard* should be perfect fun for the arcade.



This lanky goon is the bad guy who's constantly yelling at his hirelings throughout the game



Bosses (like this one in blue) become quicker and more clever in their attacks in later stages

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ng alphas

Mechwarrior: Mercenaries

Format: **PC CD-ROM**Publisher: **Activision**Developer: **Activision**Release Date: **fall**Origin: **U.S.**

How do you continue a series when the universe it's based on runs out of ideas? Simple, make a prequel and up the ante

The time lag between the release of *Mechwarrior* and *Mechwarrior II* is the stuff of industry legend, but few could argue that the game wasn't worth the wait. Thankfully, however, the next entry in the *Mechwarrior* series shouldn't take nearly that long. *Mechwarrior: Mercenaries* is planned to arrive in a timely fashion after the WWII expansion pack, *Ghost Bear*.

But the approach is pure retro. Instead of a direct sequel, *Mercenaries* is planned as a prequel. Jack Marmals, project director at Activision, explains, "The problem with FASA's *Battletech* universe is that it ends roughly where *Ghost Bear* ends, and FASA won't let us go beyond that. Just covering another Clan wasn't the way to go, since that wouldn't add much that was new.

"So we looked at the entire span of the *Battletech* universe," Marmals adds, "and decided that the most interesting time really was in the Inner Sphere, when the Clans were just coming back."

During this period and location in *Battletech* history, 'mechs are essentially artifacts. There are lots of them around, but the ability to build new ones has been lost. From a design standpoint, however, it gives the developers a wide



The world of *Mechwarrior: Mercenaries* is messier and more dangerous than *Mech II*, but also adds many more options and gameplay features

range of 'mechs that have never been used before in a computer game. "Actually," Marmals continues, "during this period of *Battletech* history, there were more kinds of 'mechs available than any other time — more than were available in *Mech II* and *Ghost Bear* combined, about 32 different mechs."

To make the scenario even more accessible, instead of basing the player in a given Clan or House with all its attendant rules and codes of honor, the designers decided to let the players loose and fend for themselves — hence the title, *Mercenaries*. The game begins some 25 years before the events of *Mech II* with the player inheriting a company of freelance mechwarriors and looking for jobs among the Houses of the Inner Sphere. But the kicker doesn't come until halfway through the game, when the Clans invade and the player has to fight to keep them out.

This might be a nightmare because the Clans are tough, but the player has the advantage of not being bound by *Mech II*'s and *Ghost Bear*'s codes of honor. "The whole thing is wide open," Marmals concludes. "You can play dirty, you can flee, you can choose to fight using the heaviest 'mech you can get your hands on, anything goes."



Expect to see 'mechs and hardware you've never seen before



As a mercenary, the player won't be bound by Clan Codes — cool



The missions will be more varied, and the "second-order" attitude that prevailed in *Mech II* is replaced by "come back to me place — those 'mechs are expensive!"



As a direct prequel, *Mercenaries* ends in a huge battle that sets up the events of *Mechwarrior II* and the Clan battles that follow

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ng alphas

Fighting Vipers



FV: Not so sharp, not as clear, but just as fast and with dead-on control

Format: Saturn
 Publisher: Sega
 Developer: Sega AM2
 Release Date: fall
 Origin: Japan

As presented in a 50%-complete form at the Tokyo Toy show in June, AM2's Saturn version of *Fighting Vipers* had all fighters and a two-player mode in place. Since that time the design team has mostly dedicated itself to optimizing the code and keeping the frame rate high.

From this early look, it seems apparent that *Fighting Vipers*' only notable difference from the arcade version is a slightly lower resolution and level of detail. The loss was necessary in order to fully model the arenas in which the combatants fight, which are an integral feature of the game.

However, the loss is noticeable even compared to AM2's smashingly successful conversion of *Virtua Fighter 2* last year. Which would seem to cast doubt on Sega's claim that the only reason the Saturn VF2 didn't replicate the arcade's full 3D backgrounds was a lack of time imposed by having the product out by the '95 holiday season. But since each of FV's characters come equipped

Is AM2, the force behind the stunning *Virtua Fighter 2*, just going through the motions with its latest effort?

with armor and other interactive accessories which VF2's characters do not have, this may not be the case.

Still, it's clear that AM2's experience with VF2 was productive. All of *Fighting Vipers*' screens, while not as detailed as the arcade version, are clearly on par with other 3D brawlers for home consoles — and perhaps more important, at least as visually impressive as its immediate console rival this fall, Namco's *Tekken 2* for PlayStation.

With the game's engine in final tuning, AM2 is currently deciding what extras can be added to the home version. While these will almost certainly include the usual tournament and survivor modes, rumor has it that it may be possible to remove the mini-skirt-wearing Cutley's clothing after winning 100 consecutive fights. There is no word (ahem) on whether this will be included in the U.S. version.



Actually, the loss of graphic detail is surprisingly small — a Saturn OS Gouraud-shading tool helps make up for a reduced polygon count



FV's caged arenas and 3D backgrounds will arrive for Saturn intact

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A dynamic action scene featuring Iron Man and Thor. Iron Man, in his iconic red and gold armor, is positioned in the upper left, with his right hand glowing with a bright yellow energy. Thor, in his blue and silver armor, is in the lower right, looking intensely at the viewer. The background is dark and filled with the metallic details of their armor and weapons. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

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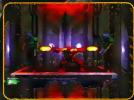
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Interplay

One of gaming's most prolific publishers has a full slate for the fall and winter



Lost Vikings 2 marks the 32-bit return of Interplay's puzzle-battling Norse trio



An early character sketch for Din the Beard, the company's first 3D beaver



Interplay's answer to Torne: Necro is Shattered Steel, a "rock 'n' roller"

Format: **multiple**
 Publisher: **Interplay**
 Developer: **multiple**
 Release Date: **fourth quarter**
 Origin: **multiple**

As you might well expect from one of the largest game publishers in the known universe, Interplay has a full slate of titles coming this fall across numerous platforms. This company profile is a little off the beaten path for Next Generation, as it is a massive list that includes several new titles, a few long-awaited sequels, and more than a couple of surprises, rather than an in-depth look at a few key titles.

Having finally

released *Stonekeep* — one of the longest delayed titles in gaming history — late last year, the company is in full production of several more games to satiate the appetites of the PC RPG audience with its *Forgotten Realms* license. The premiere game in the series is *Descent to Undermountain*,

an action-RPG hybrid which, as the title implies, uses Interplay's highly successful

Descent engine from developer Parallax in the service of TSR's fantasy universe.

Since the game is based on one of the most tightly written 3D engines available, it features fully 3D, polygon-based enemies and miles and miles of underground caverns. The player journeys into the caverns of *Undermountain* in the quest for the *Flamesword of Lloth*, with the eventual goal of defeating the evil *Drow Elf Queen*. Also set in the *Forgotten Realms* universe, if somewhat less ambitious in scope, is *Forgotten Realms: Blood and Magic*. Using a more traditional RPG structure, *B&M* puts the player in command of 28 characters in a war against evil. And, not to be (ahem) forgotten is *Dragon Dice*, a computerized version of TSR's highly successful dice-based battle game.

Also coming for PC this fall is *Star Trek: Starfleet Academy*. Players enroll as cadets and take command through 27 training missions, overseen by "Star Trek" legends Kirk, Chekov, and Sulu. A

The premiere game in the series is *Descent to Undermountain*, an action-RPG hybrid which uses Interplay's successful *Descent* engine



Dooh... scads of stuff — *Red Asphalt*, a follow up to *Rock 'n' Roll Racing* (top left, top right); a space battle from *Starfleet Academy* (above left); and a new character from *ClayFighter II* (above right);

ng alphas



Mummy — Tomb of the Pharaoh blends FMV and graphic adventure

combination space combat sim and strategy title, players need to use their brains as well as reflexes if they hope to graduate. Another title of interest is *Realms of the Haunting*, a horror and fantasy-themed graphic adventure set in the remote Cornish village of Hellston, an actual town in rural England. Somewhat less esoteric is *Mummy — Tomb of the Pharaohs*, a follow-up to last year's *Frankenstein: Through the Eyes of the Monster*. Like *Frankenstein*, *Mummy* is also available for Mac and features a mix of graphic adventure and FMV, this time starring Malcolm MacDowell (who's in danger of becoming almost as ubiquitous in FMV titles as John Rhys-Davies).

More action-oriented

titles for PC include Interplay's entry into the *Command and Conquer* realtime war strategy genre, *M.A.X.* This game is somewhat unusual among its competitors in that every vehicle in the game is fully customizable, and otherwise boasts 24 different worlds and fully networkable gameplay. *Shattered Steel* is a "mech combat sim scheduled for release on both PC and Mac, featuring 360° 3D gameplay and more than 50 different kinds of enemies, including airborne choppers. In a similar vein is *Fragile Alliance*, a vaguely *Star Control*-influenced combination of adventuring and realtime action. *Die by the Sword* is a 3D fighting game which abandons motion capture for a new process, VSIM Motion Control, to produce lifelike movement on the fly. On a



Forgotten Realms: Blood and Magic is the closest thing to a traditional RPG Interplay has coaxed this fall (top); *M.A.X.* is the company's entry in the tough, harsh, competitive world of realtime battle sims (below)



Fragile Alliance (top): The 3D RPG *Descent to Undermountain* (right)



different tack is *Shadow*, Interplay's follow-up to *Kingdom: the Far Reaches*. A graphic adventure using animated clips, *Shadow* will be available for both Mac and PC.

Interplay's slate

of console games is not much smaller. *Re-Loaded*, a sequel to the gore-spurting *Loaded*, can be expected to be on store shelves by midwinter. Along with returning characters Mama and Frank, there will be a number of new bloodthirsty maniacs to control, along with increased puzzle elements that should hopefully alleviate the mindless, repetitive action of the original. Other sequels are less timely. *Red Alpha* is a semisequel to Interplay's classic combat car game, *Rock 'n' Roll Racing*, while *Lost Viking II: Norse by Northwest* is a new follow-up to one of the most underappreciated action-puzzle titles of the last five years. All three should be available for both PlayStation and Saturn.

Also for PlayStation this fall is *Hardware*, a new 3D adventure set on Titan, where the only way off is to steal, fight, and (sometimes) trade for enough hardware to build a ship that can get you out of there. Lastly, *Tempest X* is an update to the classic, using the power of PlayStation to create game arenas that retain the feel of the original, but also have the ability to move and change during a stage.

Indeed, with so many titles across so many different platforms, it's clear that Interplay has set itself a furious pace. We wish them well.

M.A.X. is unique in that every vehicle in the game is fully customizable, and boasts 24 different worlds and fully networkable gameplay



Shadow features animation from the creator of *Space Ace*



An interview with

Brian Fargo

Next Generation met with Interplay's founder and president to get a view on his thoughts concerning online gaming, and the future of the consoles.

NG: Could you tell us about Interplay's online gaming project, Engage?

Brian: Well it will be spun off as an outside company of Interplay. So, in the beginning it will be owned by Interplay, but we have plans to bring in some other strategic partners, who, both from a money standpoint and hopefully a content standpoint, will also be dedicating their resources toward it.

It's sort of like wanting to be a bit like the MTV or the HBO of gaming — a name, and a place to go — where you know you'll get the Interplay content, but also a lot of other stuff. For instance, we have the rights for *SlimCity 2000*, which is a Maxis title; it's not Interplay's.

NG: How will Engage differ from the other online gaming providers like Catapukt, TEN, and MPath?

Brian: The big advantage with Engage is that it is fairly ubiquitous about how you get to it. It doesn't matter if you are on the Internet, AOL, Prodigy, or the Microsoft Network — it doesn't matter. You'll just click on an icon and you'll be there.

In the future, you'll be playing a game, and there will be a button up in the corner of the screen to connect you to Engage. You can click on it anytime you like, and it will ask, "What online service do you belong to?" And you'll say AOL. It then logs you onto AOL, and from AOL you bounce over to Engage, and boom, up comes the menu and it asks "Who do you want to play?" You choose, and you're off and going.

NG: And you see this as preferable to having the MPath and TEN systems, in which you have to have an account with them, and log on directly?

Brian: I certainly believe that a lot of people aren't going to want to pay a second bill.

NG: The flipside of Engage's system, though, is that by making it accessible from any point on the Internet or WWW, you won't be able to deal with the problems of latency (the time it takes for the game to react to players' controls) as well as the other gaming services are able to...

Brian: If you look at AOL, CompuServe, or Microsoft — just to name three — these guys are spending hundreds of millions of dollars to solve these latency problems. So as they bring the latencies down, we'll just ride on the coattails of their efforts.

Ultimately, though, I don't know if latency is really the biggest problem. I don't think that hard-core action games like *Mortal Kombat* can ever be done unless you've got latencies of less than 100 milliseconds. Anything slower than that, and



"The big advantage with Engage is that it's fairly ubiquitous about how you get to it. Just click on an icon and you'll be there"

you have to do some hiding.

NG: So give us some numbers. How will Engage's latencies compare to those of your competition?

Brian: A lot of these so-called, low-latency Internet-related networks are claiming latencies of around 300 milliseconds. Well, Engage runs at 500 milliseconds without trying real hard. And we, too, will cut deals

with the Internet service providers to get what basically is preferred routing, so you don't get banded to Australia and back trying to get a message across.

NG: So if you're saying that fast-paced action games are impossible for the moment, what are the type of games that are going to get everyone excited about online gaming?

Brian: Not all arcade games are impossible. I mean, take a look at *Super Air Warrior*, which runs on a couple of the online services. They may have 100 people dog fighting in air, and these people are having a great time every night, and it's a big deal. And yet they're dealing with latencies that are 500, 600, or 700 milliseconds.

There are games in which you can hide latency enough from the user that they can't feel it. It's a design issue. Latency, whether it's 300, 400, or 500 milliseconds, is just a design consideration — and you just design your games around it. And I fully expect that you can deliver compelling entertaining experiences with latencies of 300 or 500 milliseconds. And so that's why I don't get all hung up with latency because it just seems like some kind of a sideshow to me.

NG: So if it's not latency, what do you think are the big problems with online gaming that people haven't figured out yet?

Brian: Well, I guess early on would be ease-of-use and ease of getting there; how difficult is it going to be to get onto the service; how is the billing going to be done; do people want to give their Visa cards, etc. So those are real topical issues.

But I think that the real challenge is going to come from the fact that running an online service is more like running a television station than running a software company. Because for the most part, with a traditional software publisher, when you ship a game, you're kind of done. I mean, you've done your marketing and then at that point, you're in God's hands.

With an online game, you ship it and your life just begins, because you have an ongoing relationship with that customer, forever, everyday. In a sense, he doesn't buy it just once, he buys it 100 times. And so there is a responsibility there, in terms of what his experience is, and this largely depends on the freshness of it all.

NG: So — other than making the game as good as possible — how do you keep people

ng alphas

coming back for more?

Brian: Ideally, it's a constantly changing world. And this kind of thing doesn't happen by accident at all; you need an effort there to make it happen.

NG: What sort of games do you think will make it big in the online gaming world in the next year or two?

Brian: This is the real challenge for us all — to figure out which game genres and elements people are really going to react to when they get out there.

We may find that puzzle games are the thing that everybody really enjoys. Adventure games, for example, don't make any sense at all — they tend to be somewhat of a solitary thing, unless you have a group of friends over who all sit in front of the same computer yelling and trying different things.

NG: How do you make sure that the potential of matching up human opponents is fully realized, and that you don't just find yourself playing against some faceless, anonymous, obscure user name?

Brian: Certainly, people need to be able to communicate to one another, and make it very personalized. But where you're really going to get this element of human contact is in the chat rooms. At the chat rooms after each game, one guy is going to brag about how he beat the other guy or how he beat you, and then you're going to have camaraderie. And then eventually there are going to be people who team up and you'll get to know them like real people.

And sometimes they'll be your teammates, sometimes they'll be your opponents. And I think that within that world environment you'll start to develop these types of relationships which are all based upon... well, in a way, these games are a side show to create an interesting kind of community; it's almost an excuse to get out there, to share an experience.

That's what makes film and the movies so powerful — they are really shared experiences. We all go to the movies, we go out to dinner afterward, we talk about "How you seen this?" and we talk about our experience of whether we liked the film or not. That's what I love about the movie business over the software business — this is where it has an advantage.

NG: Do you think that being able to hear the other players will make a lot of difference?

Brian: Well, I know that the guys here — when they play games over the LAN — put all of the phones on speaker phone, so they can all yell at each other. And that's kind of the next thing with online. There will be that capability without impacting latency too much, where people can speak when they are playing. So I think there may be, you know, "Got you, you sucker!" and players talking to

each other the whole time.

I think this is a very natural way of making the whole experience more human. But the playing against other people is a fascinating element. I mean, with your ego at stake, you lose to a computer, you don't really care. You lose to a human, you care.

NG: Are there other advantages to playing against human opponents?

Brian: I play *Commander and Conquer* head-to-head, and some of the things that are done to me by my friends, if the computer did it, I would be frustrated and I would probably throw it in the trash and say "That's not fair. It's cheating."

Whereas if friends do that same thing to you, you appreciate the ingenuity of it all. So



"There are games in which you can hide latency enough from the user that they can't feel it. It's a design consideration"

you are already willing to accept and put up with more things than you ever would from a computer. AI. It's a real different dynamic.

NG: Isn't there a danger that this new online business is simply stealing money from the conventional game business? If people are spending their money on online gaming, are they buying less packaged games?

Brian: There's probably some hit on that. You will get a certain amount of people who aren't particularly gamers either. I mean if you're out cruising and say I want to go play a game tonight, there's not much of a decision because you go there and it's up and

it's running. I don't know on the other hand, many of the products that will require the boxed part in order to play. So, they're so interlinked that I'd say that whatever the drop is you probably gain from forcing the direct sales of the product in order to get to it. Because with a lot of the game experiences, you're going to have to have the CD on your side. And you don't send that kind of information back and forth over the phone lines.

Consoles

NG: How well do you think PlayStation's doing right now?

Brian: Well, PlayStation's clearly a success. I think that the guys at Sony can really "high five" each other and say that they have pulled off what they wanted to pull off, and they continue to have momentum.

It will be typical that there'll be too many titles, and so there'll be a dilution of some sales. Sony is already getting tougher on what it'll release. It's much harder on title approvals now. To port a product that existed on DOS first — well, good luck.

NG: How about Sega?

Brian: Sega has taken over Sony in Japan market share-wise, mostly based upon their arcade titles. Of the top 10 titles, Sega probably has eight of them.

And you never want to count Sega out because it's always going to have the arcade titles. The people at Sega are very clever marketers, they do have a good strong name, and you never know when the momentum is going to shift.

NG: And Nintendo?

Brian: Nintendo lost its momentum for a few years, but now I would argue that it's getting some of its momentum back again. **NG:** Do you think that the delays will have hurt Nintendo 64 at all?

Brian: No. I read your magazine and the feeling is positive. It's a great machine and the titles are going to be super, and you know — "make headlines, not deadlines." One year from now, everyone will have forgotten the machine was late. The only time being late really kills you is if, technologically speaking, you've truly sunk behind the competition. But that's not the case with Nintendo.

But the fact that it's based on cartridges is certainly not good for third-party licensees; it's very difficult to make money. It's easier for a first party like Nintendo to do it. But I'll buy one.

NG: How possible is a 1996 launch of an M2-based game machine from Matsushita?

Brian: It's impractical to think they could ship it this year. They'd be shooting themselves in the foot. If they could get some major software lined up. Well... you'd rather be late and have it be right.



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Interactive

Magic

"Wild Bill" Stealey's new company sticks to what it knows best. But does the world really want more flight sims?

Format: multiple
Publisher: Interactive Magic
Developer: multiple
Release Date: fall
Origin: multiple

It's a well-documented rumor that Microprose started on a bet, when "Wild Bill" Stealey wagered his buddy Sid Meier 25 cents that he couldn't design a better flight sim than Red Baron. Meier came up with *Hellcat Ace*, a big hit, and the seed which grew into one of America's biggest gaming success stories.

Stealey stayed with Microprose until 1993 when the company's merger with Spectrum Holobyte left him without a clear position. "Spectrum Holobyte had a lot of cash and very few products," he explains. "Microprose had a lot of products and no cash. It was a great marriage, but the new company only needed one chairman, so I resigned."

After a year spent improving his golf, Stealey set up Interactive Magic with the intention of producing the best sims, the best strategy titles, and nothing else. It's very much a model of Microprose's golden years, and so far it's worked.

Last year's *Apache* was a big hit and the company now employs around 70 people, has its own in-house development team, and publishes games for Digital Integration, Kesmai and Enlight.

Despite the crossover appeal of *Capitalism* and *Apache*, however, most strategy games and flight sims still only appeal to a relatively small number of gamers. The challenge facing Interactive Magic is to widen the appeal of its chosen genres and to give people who aren't obsessed with, say, the wing spans



of late 1950s aircraft a reason to play.

Considering both Stealey's background as a pilot and the nature of his work at Microprose, however, and it's no surprise that one of Interactive Magic's premiere products for 1996 is a flight sim.

Air Warrior 2 (a sequel to Kesmai Corporation's ancient 8-bit original) includes 75 missions and 30 aircraft, taking in an impressive range of technology and scenarios from WWI through to the Korean War. Kesmai (under the guidance of Stealey himself) has upgraded the flat-shaded polygon landscapes, revamped the cockpit displays (now based on photographic representations of the real things), and reworked the overall look of the game for a more attractive flight environment.

As for gameplay, it's flight sim business as usual, with bombing, dog fights, complex controls, and super-realistic handling. In one-player terms, certainly, *Air Warrior 2* is going to be pure fantasy stuff for dogfight fanatics,



Optim screens look like an airport (top). The cockpit view is super realistic (above).

Interactive Magic's challenge is to widen the appeal of the games it chooses to make



Air Warrior 2 delivers a sky full of human controlled planes

ng alphas



The SVGA graphics advance the look of *Air Warrior 2* (top). To enable speedy combat, expect flat-shaded polygons during online gameplay (above)

Dagger and Destiny

Interactive Magic's key obsessions — multiplayer options — have been passed on to *Destiny's* developer Dagger Interactive. It's no surprise, then, to learn that *Destiny* is full of them.

To get the most from multiplayer games, Dagger has sought to steer players away from military conflict and toward the oft-neglected areas of trade and diplomacy. With complex options and an intricate text interface, players can barter with each other, double-cross each other, form alliances, and generally act as humans do and computer opponents, however intelligent, don't. It's an ambitious project, sure, but the rewards could be great.



Destiny features tons of data, which come at the cost of beauty

and, to some extent, pure tedium for almost anyone else.

Still, like its predecessor, this game is saved by an online option enabling players to challenge others over the Internet. At the moment the service is only available via Genie, but IM has negotiated a deal to make it available through AOL. The importance of this feature cannot be overstated. Knowing that you're fighting humans, and that the dots in the distance are controlled by real people adds immeasurably to the experience (as does needlessly gloating when you shoot them down).

But players can go beyond simple maliciousness to form partnerships. For example, if one person decides to fly a bomber, he or she can employ the program chat mode to recruit gunners. In this way, four people from different parts of the world can sit in the same plane. Also, when entering *Air Warrior 2*, players must join one of three "sides," enabling more complex strategic alliances. A bomber, therefore, can be accompanied by several allied fighter planes, and the whole formation can fly off to destroy a rival side's airbase.

Of course, the ultimate confirmation of *Air Warrior 2's* authenticity is that Stealey plays the game obsessively and howls whenever he's shot down. (It is hoped that the fact that an ex-pilot can be shot down by people who have never flown real planes is merely evidence of the game's intuitive and uncomplicated control method.)

Joining *Air Warrior 2* among Interactive Magic's flight sim output this year is *F-22*, an in-house effort based on the new Stealth/F-16 hybrid. The title is currently in early stages of development, but already looks impressive. The landscape, for example, is created using real satellite photos which are then mapped over topographically accurate polygon models. The result is realistic scenery that doesn't affect the frame rate: *F-22* designers have the game running at 20-22 fps on a Pentium 90.

One game which proved infinitely attractive to the layman was *Civilization*, and *Destiny* is a *Civ* clone which, on paper, sounds scarily similar to Sid Meier's quintessential title. In *Destiny*, the player becomes a clan leader and guides his tribe from the Stone Age to modern times, fending off aggressive rival tribes and taking care of scientific, environmental, economic, and military concerns along the way.

Fortunately, the designers of *Destiny*,

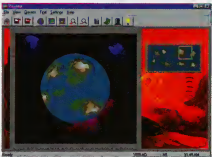


U.K. team Dagger Interactive, have found ways to distinguish its title from Meier's. Unlike *Civ*, *Destiny* participants can choose to focus their campaign on one era, so games can be played in a shorter period of time. Further, battles involve directly moving troops and vehicles in the more complex fashion of true war games, rather than watching one icon moving on top of another. Significantly, in multiplayer mode, *Destiny* is played in realtime.

Although this shot is pre-rendered, *Destiny* will be a real-time 3D game, enabling more views than other games of the genre

The ultimate confirmation of *Air Warrior 2's* authenticity is that Stealey — an ex-pilot — plays it obsessively

Perhaps as a result of IM's specialist scope, and the strong influence of its founder, the company presents a much more unified philosophy about what makes a good game than many other publishers. Stealey's beloved online option, which will prove important when *Air Warrior 2* premieres, will eventually make its way into each release — fully establishing Stealey's commitment to multiplayer gaming.



Players familiar with the God-games genre should find that the Windows 95 interface makes accessing *Destiny's* myriad of options easy

An interview with

"Wild Bill" Stealey

Next Generation spent the day with Wild Bill Stealey, flying through the skies in the "company airplane," all the while gleaned information from the colorful former pilot (with occasional moments of feeling decidedly ill).

NG: You've hired a lot of people who have no experience in the computer game industry. Why is this?

Bill: Sometimes being in the computer game industry for a long time makes you kind of stuck in a mode, like "Well, we used to do it that way for God's sakes, so we'll do it that way again." So I don't think having software people with a gaming background is a sure; good software people are good software people. I'm building a company that is just based on the quality of the software, and it's much more of an engineering effort than my old MicroProse days when there was a bunch of us hackers just snacking around.

But everybody who I hire back in the software department at least has an interest in games. And my three top game designers — Al Hendrick, Bruce Milligan, Craig Taylor — have been around a long time. I'm in here playing *Air Warrior* until 12 at night with all my guys, so we all love games. And as for experience, I've got a fair amount and everybody else can learn on the job.

NG: You even hired one person you met at a Hardee's drive-through restaurant.

Bill: I did! [laughs] That dinglebutt? Uh, Michael Chin.

I was here in North Carolina, looking at another business with Bob Pickins, our president, and I started talking about games. We pulled through to this drive-through, and I said "Oh hello, how are you, yes \$1.98, oh OK, fine. Do you know F-15 Strike Eagle, F-19 Stealth Fighter, Ganshig, Silent Service, Privateer, or Civilization?" He says, "Yeah, I know all those games. They're great!" I said "Yeah, well I made those." He said, "Are you Sid Meyer?" [laughs.] I slammed on the brake and said, "No I'm not Sid Meyer, I'm taller than he is!"

But this guy at the drive-through liked

Sid — he was a fan — and he was a history major, and I think people who are interested in games are interested in history. And I'm interested in history — I was an engineer at the Air Force Academy, but a history minor. I took as many history courses as I could get.

But anyway, here's this history major Michael Chin, working at this drive-through,



"I don't want to compete with Origin's \$12 million budget for its fantasy role-playing Wing Commander dinglebutt"

getting ready to go back to get a history master's degree at Cal Berkeley, so he's certainly a bright young man, and he knew games and was interested. He's been playing all my games for 100 years, so I figured that was good enough. So I said, "How much do you like games, would you like to design one?" And he said OK, so we taught him what good games were about.

NG: Cool.

Bill: Yeah, he's my Hardee's boy. What else? **NG:** You're focusing on strategy sims, it says so right on your business cards. It's definitely a niche market, and it's not going to sell as many copies as *Doom* or *Quake* or...

Bill: Don't want to.

NG: Don't want to? Why not?

Bill: I want to make sophisticated games for adult boys. We won't be in the marketing war that GT Interactive's got to be in (spending 10 gazillion dollars) and I won't have to compete with Origin (\$12 million for its fantasy role-playing *Wing Commander dinglebutt*).

But it's in where all the big boys in the game industry are going because all these guys who have more money than they have sense about games can go there and hire a gazillion people out of Hollywood.

They can get the best licenses off the latest Arnold Schwarzenegger movie. Good Paramount! Go, Viacom, go! Go ahead all you guys, do all that really cool stuff that really is better VCR tape than it is a game! And you guys will get all the press and all the glory and I'll build this really cool, sustainable company that does games I like!

So I'll get games I like, I'll make good money, I'll provide employment for 100 or 200 people, and I'll provide joy for millions of gamers around the world who don't want to play the next "kick-fu" game or the next blast-'em-up game, or the next interactive movie, for God's sakes.

So, firstly it's a strategic position on the business part of it. Two, it builds a nice sustainable company. And three, it gives me games I like.

NG: Interactive Magic is a small company, and — as you say — you're doing games that are far less commercially appealing than the *Wing Commanders*; and yet you get great distribution. Is that just because of you and your reputation or...

Bill: It's because I made all the mistakes about 100 times. Here, if I only make 50, we'll get there.

And I do have a good reputation for making quality products. Just now I'm starting through my round of looking at Interactive Magic's upcoming products and saying, "Well, this isn't good enough, and

ng alphas

this isn't good enough," and I'm pissing my designers off because what they want from me are just minor interface changes.

So we won't get 'em all done in time. But the guys will get better and better at doing what Wild Bill wants. And people in distribution know that I'm good at looking at a game, and making sure it's a good one.

NG: Does your reputation help you?

Bill: I'm worried to death about my reputation. I know how to do all the promotion and all that kind of stuff, and I can walk right up to the guys at the Electronic Boutique and say to Joe Firestone, "Joe, I've got some cool games." He'll say, "Bill you've been telling me that for 15 years, for God's sakes!" and I'd say "No, I really do..." He'll retort, "Well, talk to my manager, and we'll give you a shot."

So they'll give us a shot. So the "shot" is there. Now the question is: Can we bring 'em good games that sell? And then we'll get another shot and we'll keep going.

So yeah, it's because I'm here, from a standpoint of getting started. But to keep and build your reputation, you gotta keep working on it every day.

NG: Do you play all the games you release?

Bill: Absolutely, positively overnight! Yes sir! I don't play them as extensively as a hard-core gamer, but I play them enough to answer the question, "Is it fun?" We see gamers as wanting to play games at four different levels.

First, we've got what we call the "Bob" level which is named after Bob Pickens, our president, because he wouldn't know a good game if it bit him in the ass! Don't quote me... well, go ahead, quote me on that.

Then, we've got the beginner level which means "I just want to do a few little things and have fun."

Then we've got the "Major Bill" level, which means I want playing it to be cool, I want to have a few little problems, I want to go out and fall once in a while, but most of the time win and get lots of medals.

Then we've got the hard-core level, way up there. I don't play up there. I let all my guys talk about how the radar is and what's the flight envelope, and I'll argue with the best of them that the F-15, full of gas and full of bombs at 25,000 feet is a dog— I mean, I had so many arguments with people

on why the F-15 was rocket-powered! I said "No it's a pig!" It is really a pig when it's loaded up. But I let the hard-core guys do that stuff, and we got a lot of hard-core techie guys back there, I'll let them do that...

So we've got the "Bob" level, the "beginner" level, the "Major Bill" level, and the "Hard-Core" level, and I play them at my level — have a little fun, blow up little things, show cool graphics, and have a good interface. That's Bill's level.

NG: Is playing *Air Warrior* online more fun than playing it in single-player mode?

Bill: Absolutely.

NG: Is this the future? Are you guys looking exclusively toward online gaming?

Bill: We'll always do an offline game, if you

drive, or be your gunner. You'd want me on your team, let's put it that way. And I'm one of the few guys out there who's flown a lot of formations before and if you want to go out and do a mission, you want me on your wing.

I'll keep you from getting shot down. At least the first three planes won't make it to you. The fourth one might.

NG: You've flown real fighter planes, and you've got your own combat plane that you fly on a regular basis. So how on earth can you have any fun with a flight simulator? Surely flight sims are for those of us who can't fly in the real world?

Bill: I like the flight simulator for the planning, the thinking, and the strategizing.

It's less the jerk-and-berk — that's not me. I want to sneak up, I want to show I'm smarter, smarter than the simulation can run the simulation.

Because I believe all pilots are good at what I call "situation awareness." It's not "turn, burn, let me pull up, wrap up, shoot ya down," it's thinking. Fighter pilots are smart. They used to have good eyes and were kind of smart, now they've got to be really smart, and they've got to think, they've got to plan, 'cause there's too much high-tech

stuff out there that'll clean their clock so fast it'd make their head spin. So you'd better be smart, you'd better be thinking.

And I like the whole strategy that goes along with flying and commanding a mission. Of course, I do like the excitement of actually getting in on the target, but getting there and getting out is a real challenge. I don't know if you ever flew the *Stealth Fighter* game I did a long time ago...

NG: The F-117A...

Bill: Yeah, but the whole thing there was [whispers] quiet, sneaky, staying below the mountains, and staying way out of the way.

But I thought that was cool! 'Cause that gives me the old tingle in the cojones, you know? Cause you don't want to dogfight with an F-19 or the F-117A, you want to sneak in on them. Get in, wily 'em up, and sneak back. It's like the bulge in town — you sneak up, [whack] slap 'em upside the head, and then run like hell. So, I like the challenge and the thinking that goes along. Then I go to war, and I like to prove that I'm a better flyer than a lot of those guys out there.

And luckily, I am.



"As your wing man, I'll keep you from getting shot down in *Air Warrior*. At least the first three planes won't get to you. The fourth one might"

will, a box game so that you can practice, get a few medals and, basically just set up how much you want to compete.

And then when you get through training, single missions, and campaigns, there's modern-to-modern, LAN network play, and then, when you're ready, you can get your ass kicked by Major Bill online. And I'll be there flying, and I'll practice my head off on the box game, and I'll have gotten good and I'll know all the tricks that I can possibly use, and then I'll come up online. I mean, I was up online last night until midnight.

NG: So just how good are you at *Air Warrior* online?

Bill: I used to be pretty bad, and now I'm a pretty good guy to lead the flight, or fly the



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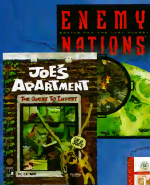
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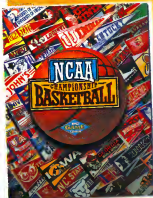
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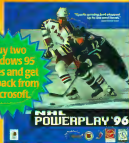
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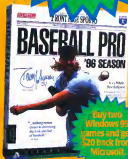
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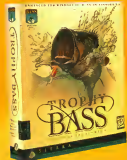
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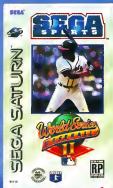
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Pilotwings Nintendo 64 **Super Mario 64** Nintendo 64 **Fada to Black** PlayStation **Legend of Oasis**
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f i n a l s

Reviews the old-fashioned way — straight to the chase

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Each month **Next Generation** gets its hands on some of the best and worst games the industry creates. We play, analyze, review, and rate each one only after thoroughly playing it to the end, to understand the ratings best, check out the ratings key, ranging from one to five stars.

★★★★★ 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 unimpaired.

★ Bad
 Crucially flawed in design or application.

Nintendo 64

Nintendo 64

FLYING HIGH

Pilotwings 64

Publisher: Nintendo

Developer: Paradigm Simulations/Nintendo

In terms of its approach, *Pilotwings 64* is similar to its 16-bit predecessor — the game is designed to show off the hardware's incredible graphics capabilities. Each island setting is faultlessly conceived, and extraordinarily detailed. They're hives of activity, with speed boats coasting across the ocean, and hang gliders circling mountain peaks. It's often hard to follow the objectives because there is so much to explore. Mountains look like mountains, water looks like water, and even fire looks realistic.

There's little scenery pop-up (the huge islands suffer a little) and there is no globalization. The title is all so far ahead of anything yet seen on a next-generation system, it simply defies belief.

Visual quality is an enormous detail, though. What really matters is gameplay, and unlike the graphics, it may not immediately impress. However, while the early levels are ridiculously easy, they're designed to allow the player some practice with each of the first three vehicles — a hang glider, a rocket pack, and a gyrocopter. Rest assured that once past the first three sessions, things get a lot more challenging. But the real beauty of the game is that although each mission has essentially the same format, each represents a completely different gameplay style. The variety is partly due to the individual crafts' peculiarities, but you're also given a choice of six pilots, each with his or her own characteristics. Beyond these superficial choices lies a surprising diversity within the game's deceptively uncomplicated structure. In one jet-pack level, the green circular hoops you're used to flying through are replaced by huge blue bells. When one is hit it bursts, revealing six smaller orange bells which all have to be burst, despite the fact that they're bouncing across the landscape. Weird.

Pilotwings 64 is a marvelous combination of traditional flight sim and surreal Nintendo gameplay. There is no doubt that the sensation of flight is totally convincing, and the accuracy of the 3D flight model combined with the luscious scenery makes *PWW64* a supreme flying experience. It's a weird mix of total realism and self-conscious videogame elements, and the two don't grate.

Pilotwings 64 is classic Nintendo: a simple, addictive game embellished with extraordinary detail and graphic finesse. Silicon Graphics' promises of delivering a games console with the power of an Oryx workstation may have been met with skepticism, but this game looks like it's running on a low resolution Oryx, and it isn't science fiction. This is easily the most impressive 3D ever seen on a console, and it's been pressed into the service of a totally charming, diverse, and enjoyable game. It may be that there is no other videogame developer in the world that could visualize and execute a game like this.

Sega. Sorry, you can start worrying now.

Rating: ★★★★★



Pilotwings' graphics won't fail to impress — it's the perfect N64 showcase game — but the gameplay is equally great



Nintendo 64

KING OF THE HILL

Super Mario 64

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo

When Nintendo decided that the first Nintendo 64 title would be the next game in the most legendary series of videogames in history, it set itself a truly Herculean task. Mario's lineage is two-dimensional, and not ideal material upon which to base the most intensely scrutinized 3D videogame of all time. It doesn't help that it comes at a time when gaming is increasingly getting its punch from guns and gore à la Quake. However, it's also clear that Super Mario 64 isn't purely for kids. True, the presentation doesn't match the edginess of new-blood games like *Wipeout XL*, but when it comes down to it, videogames exist to entertain, whether through grim cyberpunk imagery, or gaudy, toytown colors, and entertainment is Super Mario 64's watchword. In fact, Mario has so many possible actions, and the environment is so intensely interactive, that it's possible to spend hours on the first level without achieving anything in particular.

As it turns out, experimentation is integral to the experience, since there are few traditional gaming skills you can bring to Super Mario 64.

The game is initially less accessible than previous Mario titles, although the new analog controller isn't really where the difficulty lies (jig the stick slightly and Mario tiptoes; push it to its full throw and Mario runs; in between he walks): the joypad itself performs excellently. The biggest hurdle is the game camera, which moves on its own, trying to find the optimal angle to view the action. However, players can also adjust it manually, and either way you're occasionally not able to see where you're going. There is also some frustration as you spin the camera around while simultaneously attempting to run across a narrow gangplank between two floating islands. However, it's all a matter of practice, and what starts out as a pain eventually becomes just another set of skills.

The scale and variety of the game is astonishing, consisting of 15 sprawling courses with countless secret areas and bonuses. The graphics are, for all their cloying cuteness, magnificent. Shigeru Miyamoto's dream of producing an interactive cartoon has been realized to a remarkable degree. The animation is extravagant, the textures lavish, and even the most superfluous touches have the kind of detail that any developer but Nintendo wouldn't even attempt.

Super Mario 64 also puts Nintendo's much-publicized preference of "sprites over CDs" to the test, and the results are admittedly pleasing. Thirty-two bit audiences have gotten used to load times, but Super Mario 64 may remind them how gaming used to (and, Nintendo would argue, should) be: the flow is seamless, and moving from one game area to another is instantaneous.

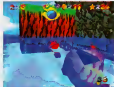
The lack of a CD-based soundtrack doesn't hamper the game either, as Nintendo's musical prodigy Koji Kondo, tunes in an inspired performance, ensuring brilliance out of the 64-bit hardware. Even though some tracks are typically cheery Japanese game music, others, like the star-laden score of the first fiery level, are at least as atmospheric as any Redbook audio. The sound effects are equally impressive — Mario's onscreen antics are matched by audible whoops and hollers, giving spark to his personality.

The premiere Nintendo 64 game vindicates the delay imposed upon the machine's release. It's true that few videogames can match the delight of one from Nintendo, but no Nintendo game you've ever seen is as delightful as this.

Rating: ★★★★★



The stunning variety of options and game environments in Mario 64 — which this handful of screens barely does justice to — renders many traditional gaming skills worthless. However, the richness of the experience makes learning new skills a reward in itself. This is clearly the best console game ever.



rating playstation

PlayStation



Playing Adidas Power Soccer's Arcade mode against a human opponent is very worthwhile.

Adidas Power Soccer

Publisher: Psygnosis

Developer: Psygnosis

Features like gorgeous motion-captured animation and large, detailed stadiums make Adidas Power Soccer one of the best soccer games buyable. But what makes APS special is the NBA Jam-style flaming kicks and the violent nature of the game.

In simulation mode, Adidas Power Soccer boasts a solid soccer game that features real players from teams in the

German, Italian, and English leagues. You can play through a season or a cup tournament, but as a simulation, APS can't compare to the likes of FIFA and Worldwide Soccer II.

Where APS separates itself from the glut of other soccer games is in the Arcade mode, where kicks to the head, super speed bursts, flaming goalkeepers, and pulling a player down by his shirt can all be done with relative ease and a rare foul. The animation for these special moves is marvelous, with Psygnosis-quality sparks, smoke, and flames springing up every vicious move. Playing against the computer like this isn't much fun, but against another person there aren't many things more satisfying than a cleat to the head. Sure, the Arcade mode deletes any realism from the game, but in lieu of accurate foot play is a gritty game that's a real blast.

Adidas Power Soccer isn't the best game of this genre on the market, but with four players there aren't many other games that generate more belly laughs. If you're looking for the perfect soccer sim, Worldwide Soccer II is still the only choice, but

Adidas Power Soccer is more than worth the purchase if you're in for some fun-out arcade action. **Rating: *****



Namco's Museum really is a museum. It doesn't just feature games, but virtual exhibits, too.

Namco Museum vol. 1

Publisher: Namco

Developer: Namco

Here's another in a growing list of retrogaming disks for PlayStation (the first being Williams' Arcade Classics). It includes the original Namco arcade hits Pole Position, Galaga, Toy Pop, Rally X, New Rally X, Star Destroyer, Bosconian, and the venerable Pac-Man. It's interesting to point

out that each of these games are being presented using the original code, pumped through a JAMMA emulator, which makes them quite literally arcade perfect.

Namco has also put a new spin on things by placing all the machines in a virtual museum in which you can wander around the machines and look at exhibits that include original sales pamphlets (in Japanese), arcade cabinet art and game instructions, pictures of the original arcade boards, and a few other historical tidbits. Also, when you finally get around to playing a game, you're given the original cabinet's dip switches to fool with, and once the machine is "turned on," you're treated to a show of the machine's original boot routine. If you've played the version of Galaga that pops up before Ridge Racer, you have an idea of how well it controls.

The museum idea is interesting, but be aware that every time you look at an exhibit, it takes forever for it to load off the disc. If you really have a nostalgic pining for the games included, by all means pick up a copy — this is as good as the sort of thing gets.

Rating: ****

PlayStation

KNOCKOUT

Fade to Black

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Developer: Delphine

French developer Delphine was responsible for several key titles in the 16-bit era, namely out of this World, its sequel, Heart of the Aetax, and Flashback. With Fade to Black, Delphine has traded in its rotoscoped sprites for motion-captured polygons, but it's clear the company is still making the same kind of games. Indeed, Fade to Black plays like a Flashback sequel in a 3D environment, which can make it something of an acquired taste. In this way, Delphine shares an affinity with its French sister-developer I-Motion for stiff action challenges and misty arbitrary puzzles.

On balance, however, it's a fine game. Like an increasing number of titles lately, Fade to Black is played from a second-person perspective — viewed from over the character's shoulder. For the most part this works well, but does lead to some strange panning and zooming, especially when your character gets his back to a wall, and can be disorienting at times. Also, for some reason, the camera switches to a side-view when the character ducks. Since you're likely to be facing an enemy when ducking, this makes it difficult to judge when you should stand back up.

Overall, the control scheme is simple enough, and the character responds well. The pace is fast, most of the puzzles are straightforward, and above all, the enemies are extremely tenacious, although it could be said this is the one major fault the game has — it's extremely easy to die. You can save the game at any time, and it's easy enough to restart, but the constant need to do so wears on you in a very short time. Also, for some strange reason, the game won't save directly to a RAM cart; you have to quit the game and copy saves manually, which makes Fade to Black a game best played in small doses. In the end, however, it's worth the effort.

Rating: ****



Fade to Black's over-the-shoulder perspective and constantly panning camera takes some getting used to, but the game's level of challenge and smooth control make it worthwhile.



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ZOMBIE
COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT



rating saturn



Olympic Soccer is full of great control, but the game is graphically a little disappointing

Olympic Soccer

Publisher: U.S. Gold

Developer: Silicon Dreams

Any game company that dares to create a soccer videogame faces the rather formidable specter of FIFA '96. Few games capture the blend of gameplay and simulation qualities as well as FIFA. But in an unconventional move, Olympic Soccer doesn't rely on its obvious license, instead taking a different tack in gameplay so as to compete with the best from Electronic Arts.

Olympic Soccer doesn't attempt to match FIFA's hundreds of terms, realistic gameplay, and its fantastic simulation components. Instead, the game offers expanded player control that enables such soccer mannequins as back-heel passes, one-two plays, bicycle kicks, and diving headers. Beyond the traditional left-right spin, forward or reverse spin can also be applied to the ball to affect its trajectory. These expanded player control aspects, coupled with a game speed that is faster than it is accurate, results in an arcade-ish quality that the casual sport fan will find appealing.

Of course, hard-core soccer fans may find U.S. Gold's new soccer entry casually entertaining but ultimately lacking. Along with the diminished size features, the lack of realism in the polygon-based graphics takes its toll. The graphics appear acceptable when the camera is panned back, but close-up camera shots reveal an acute lack of detail.

Nonetheless, if general entertainment ranks above true soccer games, Olympic Soccer will fit the bill perfectly.

Rating: ***

Space Hulk

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Developer: Krisalis

EA seems to be in the middle of porting nearly every 3DO title it ever made over to PlayStation. However, if the company continues to stick to fine titles

like Space Hulk, we'll be OK.

It would be easy to write off Space Hulk as yet another Doom clone, but Krisalis has added a few new wrinkles that make it worth a look. Based on the Games Workshop board game of the same title, and set in the Warhammer universe, Space Hulk puts you in command of an entire squad of mech-armored warriors. Each soldier can be issued orders separately, or the player can control them directly, which means that unlike Doom, you can set someone up to watch your back. And you'll need it, too — up against an army of fast-moving mutant demons known as Genestealers, you're going to need all the help you can get. Squad-level strategy is just as important as arcade skills. Plus, when an enemy gets blasted, its guts splatter the walls.

The PlayStation version doesn't offer much the 3DO version didn't. The textures appear almost identical, and there doesn't seem to be any additional missions or other



Space Hulk's mix of instant Genestealers and squad-level strategy make it worthwhile

features. In fact, the 3DO version is in some ways smoother. In this version when your "mech bumps into a wall (which is often, since many of the corridors are extremely cramped), it has a habit of straightening out in a way you didn't want it to. The pace also seems slower, as the "mechs are lumbering giants.

Still, if you like a heavy dose of atmosphere and a little strategy mixed in with the action, Space Hulk delivers.

Rating: ***

Saturn

Frank Thomas "Big Hurt" Baseball

Publisher: Acclaim

Developer: Iguana

First of the good news: the graphics in Frank Thomas "Big Hurt" Baseball are extraordinary, and



FTBB's crap graphics are really wasted on a game that should've been much better

the batters look better than in any other baseball game available. Also, there's a full Players' Association license, all the stadiums, at-bat-tracking, an announcer, and a Season mode. The bad news is that despite all these winning ingredients, the game just never achieves any sort of cohesion.

Sure, the graphics are gorgeous and all the camera angles are right on the money, but there are a few essential flaws. Yes, the players are crisp and perfectly animated, but there are only two kinds of batters — one with an open stance, one with a closed stance — which makes it really hard to believe that a new batter is coming to the plate each time up. While the game has a Season mode and all the stats, the interface isn't that easy to use, especially compared to EA's Triple Play. These are all little things, but could have been easily fixed for the final game, and, unfortunately, it's the little things that make the difference between a good game — which FTBB is — and a great game.

Graphic flaws aside, there are also a few questionable angles to the gameplay. The biggest problem occurs while batting: After pressing the swing button it takes a fraction of a second before the batter actually starts his swing. Against a fastball, this means you have to swing the instant the ball is released, leaving no idea where the ball will go. It's not such a problem against the computer because it generally throws strikes, but against a human opponent you're looking at strikeouts after strikeouts.

FTBB is an extremely solid game with little flaws that keep it from being great. With the plethora of baseball titles coming out this year, it's going to take a lot more than "good" to make the cut.

Rating: ***

Striker

Publisher: Acclaim

Developer: Rage Software

While soccer games like FIFA, VR Soccer, Worldwide Soccer, it

Addis Power Soccer, and Victory Goal are showing how much entertainment a soccer game can provide, it's really difficult to swallow a dismal effort like Striker. The idea behind Striker was to make a soccer game that was pure arcade fun. The end result: a game totally lacking in substance and style.

The graphics aren't even on par with many 16-bit games, and the control is extremely frustrating. Striker does have the distinction of being the only soccer title to feature five-on-five action both indoors and outdoors, but the execution is extremely poor. Player animation is stiff, and controlling the ball down the pitch lacks any sort of strategy or art of skills.

The game isn't completely awful — some of the nuances of playing a soccer game indoors, with walls, are sort of interesting — but after a few seconds of



Striker's graphics can't compete with some weaker 16-bit games, and the play ain't much better

staring at the poor graphics and trying to control the players' wild kicks, you'll wish you'd never even heard of this game, much less invited it into your home.

Frankly, there are far too many good soccer games on store shelves to even think about Striker as an option.

Rating: *

Virtual Open Tennis

Publisher: Acclaim

Developer: Imagineer

No matter what the name or license, virtually every tennis game ever made has had one thing in common: they are all too damn boring.

At their worst, tennis games devolve into being Pong without walls or good control, and this is the key: What makes a tennis game good or bad is control. The challenge shouldn't lie in struggling to position a little polygonal man near enough to the ball to hit it. Rather, the emphasis should be on being able to skillfully place your shots once you're there. No tennis game has ever done this well.

Virtual Open Tennis is the second-best looking tennis game ever — only Power Serve 3D

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rating 3D0



Virtual Open Tennis's players are sharp and game control is solid

Tennis was more impressive to look at, and in Virtual Open Tennis, the perspectives and the control are actually a bit better. However, playing against the computer is absolutely hopeless unless you're some kind of miracle worker, and playing against a human opponent often results in no volleys at all. Sadly is the scheme of things, that doesn't mean Virtual Open Tennis isn't a decent tennis game, because compared to the

competition, it really is one of the better ones. The problem is that tennis games haven't kept pace with the advancements in gameplay of other kinds of sport sims, and the mechanics in this tennis game needs serious work.

If you're the kind of gamer who's pleased with the way tennis games currently play, then take a look at Virtual Open Tennis. But if squinting to see where that little ball is makes you tremble with rage, then waiting for a serious advance in the tennis videogame is advised. **Rating: *****

3D0

Casper

Publisher: Interplay
Developer: Fun Comm

If you approach this game as one designed for younger gamers, then Casper is a simple,

unoffensive introduction to the world of graphic adventures. But if you approach the game and compare it directly to the best of them — *Resident Evil*, for example — it's merely an average game.

There are a few elements of game design that defy ghostly logic, such as the fact that Casper needs keys to go through doors (he should just pass through them, right?), and a special power to make his way through heating ducts — hey wait, Casper is a ghost, right?

Once you get past these silly inconsistencies (which weren't apparent in the movie, of course), however, the gameplay is no less than solid, and the general ease of the puzzles makes this game just right for its target audience. However, it's worth pointing out that while the level of challenge is appropriate for younger players, it's also not so easy that older players would get bored.



With its sophisticated graphic style, Casper may just grab the attention of older gamers

In the end, with its simple but clean graphics (including strong effects, and notably transparent ghosts, no mean feat on 300), and reasonably difficult puzzles, the game should float just fine with the younger set. Think of it as a "My First Graphic Adventure," and it wouldn't be the worst thing that could happen to your 300, by any stretch. **Rating: *****

Saturn

WONDER WALL

Legend of Oasis

Publisher: Sega

Developer: Ancient

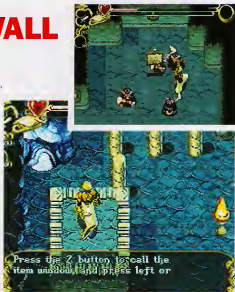
The 32-bit follow-up to Sega's *Beyond Oasis*, *Legend of Oasis*, manages to expand upon the original formula cosmetically while still offering all the great action-adventure elements that made the first game a winner. For those not familiar with the formula, *Legend of Oasis* offers an interesting blend of RPG, action, and adventure gaming elements.

Using an overhead view, the game gives the player total freedom of movement within the world, and while the action is designed to follow a linear path, there is much freedom to backtrack and explore. The vast amount of rooms and areas include so many intricate structures to climb in, on, and around that the game starts to have a 3D feel that belies its 2D graphics.

What makes *Legend of Oasis* so good, however, is not the freedom of movement, but rather the blend of puzzle challenges and frequent action sequences. While the emphasis of the game is definitely placed on revealing a complex storyline through overcoming puzzles, there's a fair amount of pure fighting action, and your character uses everything from blades to his or her feet. Best of all, even though *Legend of Oasis* wouldn't make the best pure action game by any stretch, in context, the action is fun in and of itself, and unlike some action-RPG hybrids, you won't wind up dreading every single battle.

All in all, *Legend of Oasis* is a challenging adventure with plenty of variety in gameplay. Neither a hardcore RPG nor an action game, *Legend of Oasis* falls somewhere between the cracks, and actually manages to make a well-defined spot for itself. Combine the great gameplay with some particularly nice graphics (though a bit on the cartoonish side) and gamers are in store for a solid, uncommon gaming experience.

Rating: ****



Press the Z button to call the item window, and press left or

By bringing every single aspect that was great about the 16-bit *Beyond Oasis* to the 32-bit arena, Sega's *Legend of Oasis* makes more than an admirable debut

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World Series Baseball™ II also available on Genesis as *World Series Baseball™ '96*.

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SEGA SATURN

rating pc

PC



It's easy to learn and relatively fun to play, but *Chaos Overlords* hasn't the stamina to be a classic.

Chaos Overlords**Publisher:** New World**Computing****Developer:** Stikik Men Games

Who said a city needed to be run by politicians and civil servants? As *New World Computing* shows, it can be run, and overrun, by criminal warlords. And that's what *Chaos Overlords* is—a game where the player attempts to take over a city using all sorts of anti-social antics, and there are five other overlords who are out to take over as well, so, of course, there's competition.

As a strategy game, it's not bad. You work your way through the city by overtaking small sections of it, each one containing different structures, such as casinos or temples, that add to your empire. Gameplay is turn- and menu-driven, more like *SimCity* than *Syndicate*, so there's little action—click one menu choice to buy a gang, click another to issue orders, and then wait for the results. However, it's simple enough to get into, and there's enough variety in the scenarios to keep it interesting, at least for a little while.

The best thing about it, though, is that it supports network play. It's no replacement for the likes of *Warcraft 2* or *Duke* in 3D, but it's a decent showing from the creators of *Heroes of Might and Magic*.
Rating: ***

Earthworm Jim 1 & 2: The Whole Cen of Worms**Publisher:** Playmates**Developer:** Bliny**Entertainment**

The free-wheeling, action-packed console market has launched into the PC world in a big way—the original *EWJ* was available on CD-ROM from Activision earlier this year. And now, somehow, Playmates is able to release complete versions of 1 & 2 on the same disc.

Amazingly enough, it's still just as fun as it was when it first came out for Sega Genesis.

This can be run under either Windows 95 or DOS, and while the ease of Win 95 is nice, you'll definitely get better playability if you go the DOS route. This is what the PC really needs sometimes—a nice, fast-action game that will distract the player from the more mundane pursuits of word processing or data entry, without requiring the commitment of a huge RPG or



Everyone's favorite snail does as good a job leading in a crowd on the PC as it did on Genesis.

strategy title. There's a huge variety in gameplay, from jumping ledges to navigating an underwater world in a portable bubble. The hero, Earthworm Jim, has a tremendous variety of weapons, especially in *EWJ 2*, and among platform games for the PC, it's by far the best for its value, hands down.
Rating: ****

Knight's Chase**Publisher:** i-Motion**Developer:** Infogrames

Based on Infogrames' old *Alone in the Dark* engine, *Knight's Chase* has you running around in modern day times before sending you back to medieval Europe in a mystery surrounding the Knights' Templar. The old *AITD* engine has been completely revamped, with more polygons, SVGA resolution, and some attractive lighting effects, however, it's still 3D modeled characters placed over pre-drawn backgrounds.

In terms of play control, the game is still very limited; you can only control the action from the keyboard. The least i-Motion could have done was add gamepad support. Accessing menus is relatively easy, but when you have to hit several keys to go from searching mode to fighting mode, it makes you wish you could define a few shortcut keys.

Just like *AITD* (since the backgrounds are static), there are a set number of camera angles, which makes it awkward to perform some tasks, like avoiding laser beams or having a

PC

KICKS ARSON

Fire Fight**Publisher:** Electronic Arts**Developer:** Epic MegaGames

Epic MegaGames has pulled out a few surprises lately (including the upcoming *Unreal*), and *Fire Fight* is one of them. This top-down, two-dimensional blast fest has everything a good action game should—lots of weapons, intuitive control, and a ton of cool explosions.

The keyboard layout is intentionally modeled after *Doom*, so players can get a quick handle on it. The storyline is a no-brainer, but that doesn't keep it from having a great variety of missions. While the world explodes around you, players have to make cargo pickups, hostage rescues, reconnaissance forays, and quite a bit of demolition. The game is structured so that in order to do all this stuff, you need the right powerups, and *Fire Fight* has a bunch of 'em, including a widespread electric shock, oblong, and mines. Weapons range from homing missiles, to a massive cannon that easily incinerates 'em during multiplayer games.

Unfortunately, that's where the majority of this game's appeal resides—networked, multiplayer gaming. With only 18 single-player missions, *Fire Fight* is a terribly short game. But, it supports up to four players (which is this day and age is admittedly a little thin), and when played with friends, it's a rare and exhilarating experience.

Even as a one-player game, though, it's not all bad. The high-resolution detail, 360° of rotational movement, smooth parallax scrolling, and the fast and furious gameplay will be enough to make the spare few hours it does take you to work through the game quite enjoyable. And if you have a group of friends and a network to play on, you definitely won't be sorry that you picked this up.
Rating: ****



Picking up power-ups while under fire is only one of the things that makes *Fire Fight* action-packed.



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rating pc



Knight's Chase is an improvement on Alone in the Dark, but it's still only mediocre

fight with an enemy. Put simply, the perspective sometimes makes it unclear exactly where you are or whether you're lined up correctly, and all too often the scenery gets in the way. It's a nice upgrade from *ATD*, but where that game was new and technologically amazing, we're talking about a game that arrived three years ago. *Knight's Chase* only improves on its predecessor's appearance, and that's not enough to make it a great game.

Rating: **



Lead up a few races of Micro Machines 2 on a buddy's PC, but don't go out and buy it yourself

Micro Machines 2

Developer: Codemasters
Publisher: GameTek

If you're looking for a dead-on racing sim, well, this isn't the game to pick up. But, if you're just interested in simple, broad-stroke racing that even runs fine on a 386, well, you've hit the mother lode. *Micro Machines 2* isn't anything particularly special, but the little race cars are cute, and the tracks are quite inventive — you'll have to steer clear of everything from hot stoves to sand pits, and this does include the witchen sink.

The original *Micro Machines* was one of the 8-bit NES' last standout titles, and this PC-based sequel shows its console roots. It supports up to four players, but rather than playing on a network, they all play on the same computer — a mixture of joysticks and keyboard is the best way to do it, although, as you could guess, things can get a little crowded.

However, playing the game against other human opponents is the least thing the game has to offer, since the artificial intelligence consists of one car that moves fast and makes all the correct moves, while the others go a little slower.

Micro Machines 2 isn't the sort of game to save up and purchase for your one game a month, but if a buddy has it already, or you can chip in with a few pals, it's definitely worth looking up a race or two.

Rating: ***

Pool Champion

Developer: Mindscape

Publisher: Electronic Arts
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Pool Champion mixes the traditional pool sim with a graphic adventure of sorts. As a fledgling pool player, you travel from sleepy pool halls to the

elitest world of pro tournaments. That's all fine and good, and there were a couple of console games a few years back that tried the same thing — *Final Lap* was a motorcycle racing adventure for Neo-Geo, while *Ful Court Tennis* did the same for NEC's TurboGrafx. The trouble here is, the actual pool playing pretty much sucks.

The only way to aim the ball is from an overhead view. Once lined up, the view changes to behind/beside, where you can determine the amount of "English" to put on the ball. Then, in a system that seems like it was stolen from a golf sim, you click once to pull the stick back, click again to bring it back, then click yet again to stop it from going too far. Awkward, messy, and frustrating, to say the least.

If you're looking for a graphic adventure, buy an adventure. If



Pool Champion's interface virtually eliminates decent shots

you're looking for a pool sim, you're better off checking out *Intergalactic Virtual Pool*.

Rating: *

SpaceDude

Developer: Euryvrem

Publisher: Formgen
SpaceDude is a funky, big-mouthed individual with a bad haircut who has to rescue a city from being overtaken by the KingDorf. You win when you take

PC

BULL'S EYE

AH-64D Longbow

Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Jane's Combat Simulations

Given that flying a chopper is unlike piloting any other type of craft, it's difficult to make an entertaining, engaging, and realistic helicopter simulation, but Jane's Combat Simulations has done it. The *Longbow* disk includes everything from a McDonnell-Douglas PR film that spells out the all specifications of this latest version of the Apache chopper, to the most intensive and detailed tutorial a fledgling pilot could ever hope to have for reference. Rest assured, there's enough here to draw in even the most skittish newswoman.

In fact, *Longbow* can appeal to any player, regardless of skill, since the game offers options for nine levels of realism. For the experienced pilot who demands a challenge, select the highest level of difficulty and you'll find it a daunting task just to stay in the air, much less combat enemy craft. On the other end of the scale, flight becomes as simple as walking to the local supermarket, which will be a relief for anyone who's never actually flown a helicopter sim before.

The missions are varied, and every time a new mission is created, the entire layout of the battle is changed, which means nearly endless replayability. The ground is convoluted and filled with deep ditches and rising hills, all of which are beautifully textured. Since the major upgrade to the AH-64D

from previous models was relocating the radar and targeting lasers to a god above the main rotor, the real-life chopper's most important feature is its ability to fire on and destroy ground targets while remaining safely out of sight behind a hill. Furnishing the game with a landscape that lets a pilot take advantage of this ability obviously up the realism, but also gives the player a tactical challenge he may not have faced before, and a whole list of new skills to master. If you ever even had a mid-urge to be an attack chopper fighter pilot, you owe it to yourself to buy this game.

Rating: *****

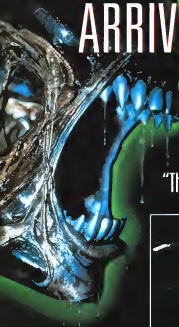


The graphics are pleasing, even though you'll need the most powerful PC on the market to run Longbow comfortably



One of Longbow's strengths is its utter realism — the AH-64D's cockpit is as close to the real thing as it could be, including the RADSS (Integrated Radar and Display Sight System)

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"The 3D engine
is first rate."

-Next Generation

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---EGM



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rating macintosh

out the KingDorf, and you lose when one of the enemies makes it to the city and destroys it.

This particular game translates into a lot of silly flying scenarios, where you have to move SpaceDuke, using the keyboard, to avoid a whole slew of projectiles, from missiles to shunks. Not bad so far, right? There is a tiny bit of strategy involved—you can, for instance, decide to either take out an enemy hopper by attacking it, or create a line of defense first—but that's not enough to even hope to compensate for the complete lack of playability. Then it gets worse: There's no save



This is what happens when the enemy gets to town. You'll have to start all over in Space Duke.

game feature. In a move that harkens back to the dawn of gaming—and with whir no discernible benefit—you simply have to start from the beginning every single time.

It's possible that some folks might find the cartoon animation mildly entertaining, and you might get a chuckle out of SpaceDuke's yell, but it gets old faster than whole milk left to sit on a radiator, and is nearly as nauseating. Recommendation: run away screaming.

Rating: *

Super Stardust '96

Publisher: Gemtek
Developer: Housemarque Games

There's a depressingly small number of good 2D shooters for the PC, and Super Stardust '96 is a perfect example why. As soon as the game starts, only one word pops to mind: Asteroids. That's exactly what the game is—a complicated version of Asteroids. Sure, the graphics are much more complex, the music is an added bonus, and the power-ups add a lot of spice, but it's still Asteroids. Happily, you can use a gamepad to control your ship, and as you move up through the levels, there are some cool items you can use, as well as some intriguing ships to destroy.



Super Stardust is little more than Asteroids all over again, except it's not as much fun.

So, to be fair, there are a few different styles of gameplay. However, that's still not enough to make up for the overwhelming lack of originality. Ultimately, it's a sad attempt to bring back a type of game that's been dead for a very long time. If you want a shooter with some action, go get Epic's Fire Fight.

Rating: *

Total Mayhem

Publisher: Demtek

Developer: Gemtek

Total Mayhem is a mix between Syndicate and Crusader: No Remorse. It sounds like a great idea, but unfortunately, the game doesn't quite pull it off.

Forget the story—it's just an excuse to kill robots. The graphics look good, and there are plenty of nice explosions, but the feel of the game is too much like a Crusader rip-off, without the same precise action and play control. You command your units by clicking the mouse, but only if you're lucky. Units have a tendency to walk around, finding



Unfortunately, Total Mayhem makes frustration a standard

their own way to go where you told them to, and, just as often as not, getting lost and never reaching the goal at all. Along the way they do things like walk right into the line of fire when you're trying to get them under cover. With more than two or three units in action at the same time, you wind up acting more like a babysitter than a commander, chasing down errant units, and serious frustration becomes the standard.

There are plenty of weapons, some interesting weapons, and a variety of enemies, which, along with network support, keeps

Total Mayhem from being a total loss, but it's certainly not enough to make this one a legend.

Rating: **

Total Pinball 3D

Publisher: 21st Century

Developer: Spidercraft

Total Pinball 3D is the latest in a slew of nostalgic pinball titles for the PC, but unfortunately for 21st Century, there's little to distinguish this one from any of its competitors.

There are four tables, and each can be viewed in 2D or 3D mode. But, only the 3D mode (where the whole table is visible) is even worth using. You can still

see the whole table in 2D mode, but in a technique that goes all the way back to Bill Budge's Raster Blaster, it only fills up one side of the screen, and on a typical 14" or 15" monitor, that makes for an awful small area.

There is a lot of variety in play style, difficulty, and theme, and the graphics are sharp, but compared to the high level of detail and originality in recent titles, the tables here look bland. Although 21st Century pioneered PC pinball with its earlier titles, much better games like Hyper 3-D Pinball and Pro Pinball: The Web now come to mind.

Rating: **

Macintosh

Macintosh

DELOVELY

Descent 2

Publisher: MacPlay

Developer: Porellax

For a change, Macintosh owners have not had to wait more than a year for a conversion of a hit PC title. While Descent 2 is not an extraordinarily innovative title, it does add several nice twists to the existing Descent engine.

Among the most notable of these additions is that of the guidebots. Guidebots are essentially friendly robots that show you around the mines as you seek out each of your objectives. In addition to your new friends, there are tons of new enemies to make your life more difficult.

In general, the new enemies and objects are composed of more polygons than in the original Descent. Graphically, the frame-rate is quite satisfactory, and the wide array of new texture maps dress up the mines quite nicely. On the aural side of the house, instead of the MIDI-based music, Realbook audio has been substituted. The gameplay itself is nearly identical to the first title, much to the satisfaction of traditional Descent fans.

Just as with the original Mac Descent, network play options with either Macs or PCs is supported on IPX networks or via modem connection. Because this title is essentially the original

Descent with new levels, and some new bells and whistles, this should be an obvious buy for original Descent fans. But, if you didn't care for the original, the odds are you won't care for Descent 2 either.

Rating: ****



Descent II is what Descent I was to Doom, a game that looks better and plays the same.

TITANIC

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GTE Entertainment

rating genesis

Genesis



Centipede is arguably the best game of Arcade Classics. Score

Arcade Classics

Publisher: Sega of America
Developer: Amoseba

There have been a couple of notable collections of arcade classic compilations released on PlayStation in the last few months, most of which have been satisfying collections of old favorites ignoring the fact that the idea of playing these classic games is usually more appealing than the reality, these compilations at least provide versions of the game using the original code and supplement the disks with a bevy of historical information. Arcade Classics for Genesis seems intent on cashing in on this nostalgic parade, but it comes embarrassingly short in delivering anything worthwhile.

Arcade Classics' most obvious shortcoming is that it only contains three games (Centipede, Ultra Pong, and Missile Command). These titles can certainly be considered classics, but the versions included on the cartridge are far from the arcade versions classics most people remember. There are actually two versions of each game in Arcade Classics, the Classic version and the "improved" Sega version.

However, the only difference between the two is that the Sega versions add cosmetic improvements to the graphics of the games, and then only at the most rudimentary level. Furthermore, the "improved" graphics in no way enhance the excruciatingly slow gameplay—the games seem more reminiscent of the sadly lacking Atari 2600 versions than anything resembling a "classic."

Ultimately, those who unwittingly go searching for fond, nostalgic remembrances of their youth in Arcade Classics are more likely to discover suppressed memories of childhood traumas instead.

Rating: ★

Bugs Bunny in Double Trouble

Publisher: Sega of America
Developer: Probe

Entertainment

Bugs Bunny in Double Trouble is another competent but unrespected side scroller that Sega has released to placate its Genesis owners. All true creativity and innovation is obviously being utilized for the development of games for Sega's 32-bit system, since the gameplay here can be said to lack overly familiar.

Is there really anything about Bugs Bunny that warrants it being labeled a bad game? Absolutely not. Is there anything about the game that sets it apart from earlier incarnations of the genre? Absolutely not. For the most part, Bugs Bunny is like any other platform game, with the only difference being that the game is filled with memorable Looney Tunes characters. The humor and animation these characters bring are the game's only notable asset.

As unremarkable as Bugs Bunny in Double Trouble is, unless you're a rabid fan of platform games or Looney Tunes characters, the average gamer is probably best cutting off an old copy of Earthworm Jim 2 in order to satisfy his side-scrolling urges.

Rating: ★★



A competent game, Bugs Bunny in Double Trouble's main attraction is its Looney Tunes characters.

Marsupilami

Publisher: Sega of America
Developer: Apache Software

From the handful of games released for Genesis this year, one can construe that Sega has

determined that its older players have since moved on to a 32-bit system. That can be the only explanation as to why the majority of the few remaining titles for Genesis seem to have an appeal directed at a decidedly younger market. Marsupilami is a perfect example of this.

By taking a familiar children's cartoon character and placing him or her within a familiar side-scrolling game format, Sega has managed to create the impression that it's supporting its "old system" while satisfying the people who it perceives as playing that system. But with the huge installed base of Genesis, the assumption that all of Sega's more mature fans have moved on seems a bit premature. This older crowd still owns its Genesis systems, and it will not find anything new or appealing in Marsupilami. The character is cute and the fact that he uses his tail to get him by the game's challenges is entertaining.

But all in all, Marsupilami is a

Genesis

WORLD SERIOUS

World Series Baseball '96

Published by: Sega
Developed by: Sega

What Sega offers for the 1996 run of the most successful baseball game ever is nearly phenomenal. By taking Blue Sky's engine, and by updating the players, Sega now churns out one more solid 15-bit effort. What this guarantees is that WSB '96 is a solid game from start to finish, with every possible feature you could want in a baseball game. You can bat using either a cursor like in Bottom Of The Ninth, or simply time your swing like in Frank 'Big Hurt' Thomas Baseball. The players are superbly animated, and for Genesis, the graphics couldn't be any better. Playing through a season is easy and rewarding with realistic results and games that are fun and fast.

Owners of WSB '95 will know exactly what to expect from this new version because only the players have changed. Everything from fielding, to hitting, to pitching, to sliding is done superbly,

ensuring that each part of the game is re-created well. The only thing that takes away from WSB '96 is that it's still last year's game, and that 32-bit systems have pushed the envelope of baseball games even further. However, while 32-bit systems have managed sharper graphics, and a few have boasted new features and gameplay enhancements, none have managed to put them in a total package that can match WSB '96, and this title makes it one of the best baseball games available.

What's certain is that Genesis isn't likely to have another baseball game of this quality ever. At the very least, this is a must have for baseball fans who are saddled with a Genesis and a long summer without basketball or football.

Rating: ★★★★★



Look familiar? It's the exact same game as last year. A great game, but with no improvements, it just couldn't earn the stars.

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rating arcade



Marsupian's tall and all its special capabilities is an integral part of the gameplay

traditional side-scrolling platform game with the gameplay aimed toward a younger audience, if you're searching for the same old gameplay, Marsupian's is for you. **Rating: A+**

X-Perts

Publisher: Sega of America
Developer: Atlusone

Every now and then, a game comes along that is not simply bad, but intrinsically insulting. The fact that Sega is asking an



The height of 16-bit? Characters can't even move around when their weapons are drawn

unsuspecting public to fork over \$70 for the painful gaming experience that is X-Perts elevates the game — or perhaps demotes it — to a better term — from the insulting level to being a crime against humanity.

The sad fact is that despite the alarming lack of substance in X-Perts, the basic premise of the game is intriguing and has potential. The prospect of controlling an elite team of agents in order to thwart the terrorist takeover of a secret undersea research lab has its appeal. Add that one of the agents is Shadow Yamato of Eternal Champion's fame, and there's definitely a solid foundation for a fun game.

But as solid as the premise of X-Perts is, the execution and game design ranks among the worst in recent memory. Control of the game's characters is slow and unresponsive with most of the gameplay centered around inept hand-to-hand combat and standing at control panels while commands are being processed. Standard gameplay elements

(such as the ability to jump) is mysteriously absent in X-Perts. The fact that your character also loses the ability to move when he or she pulls out a weapon verges on the ridiculous. There are vaguely entertaining, but repetitive, special torture moves that are supposed to elicit information from terrorists, but most of the time the move is used merely for a gratuitously bloody demise of an enemy.

Of the few positive elements in X-Perts, the main one is the graphics. X-Perts looks better than the average Genesis game, but it by no means equals the likes of a game like Toy Story or Earthworm Jim 2. If there is any gameplay element that can be deemed as a positive in the game, it is its basic structure.

Despite the "action"-based gameplay, X-Perts cannot be successfully completed without careful management of the different team members as they simultaneously go about satisfying different mission objectives. What small sense of urgency the game manages to instill in the player occurs during the strategic overview and management of what each of the agents is up to.

But whatever potential X-Perts once had (even this is questionable), the shoddy gameplay results in a final product that feels crafted without care and rushed out. X-Perts is the ultimate argument for letting the 16-bit systems die rather than prolonging the pain. **Rating: X**

Arcade

Alpine Racer

Publisher: Namco
Developer: Namco

With the success of the original Alpine Racer, it seems Namco couldn't resist the temptation of creating another, similar skiing game, Alpine Racer, which builds its premise on the balls-to-the-wall sport of snowboarding, attempts to capture the look and feel of this new sport, while widening its market of gamers to a younger, "cooler" crowd.

But what was so cool about Alpine Racer was its phenomenal ability to simulate skiing this, coupled with the sheer innovation of the game — no developer had ever really created a skiing game for the arcade before — helped place Alpine Racer as one of the all-time great arcade games. Surfer does just the same, and

Arcade

STAR STRUCK

Star Gladiator
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom

Despite Capcom's past reluctance to join the 3D fray — and instead stick with solid but repetitive, 2D, Street Fighter-type games — the company has finally planted a solid foot in a new, 3D direction. Star Gladiator is its first original 3D beat 'em up, and is a quirky, stylish game that is more subtle than obvious, with innovative gameplay and likeable character design.

The game's fighters are like a futuristic band of gypsies, a rag-bag compilation of aliens, creaturas, and robots who have been summoned to help fight against Edward Blstein, a Nobel-winning physicist, who's bound and determined to take over Earth. Capcom's four-button configuration (all other Capcom fighters are six-button configs) makes for a stuporous set of fighting and defending techniques, which include both 3D attacks and defense. But what's especially wise of the developers is the intuitive and simple way in which gamers can pull off those moves.

Attacks in 3D are made by side-stepping enemies and attacking from behind or in from the side (like in Soul Edge), or by using combinations and linked moves. Links add a whole different dimension in offensive attacks and can be followed by checking the plasma meter in the screen's right-hand corner. By finding the right series of punches, slashes, or kicks, players will discover entirely different moves they can memorize. The trick is discovering them, a small feat in itself.

Just like in any sport, you need an offense and a defense. Capcom has infused Star Gladiator with specialized defensive tactics, as well as building in standard blocks and jumps — players can move and defend in 3D — called Plasma Revenge and Plasma Reflect. Revenge is a built-in counter move which transforms an enemy's attack into your own, and Reflect blocks open the enemy's attack and enables you to start fresh with your own link or combo. Both moves are extremely useful, and each rewards the player for using his or her brain.

What we've got here is a 3D fighting game that has all the makings of a winner — smooth, beautiful animation, likeable characters, and deep gameplay. This is a fine first step into the 3D realm by Capcom. **Rating: A++**



Sweet-looking graphics, weird characters, and intuitive combat make this a great game

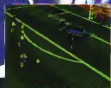
therein lies the problem. It has almost exactly the same crisp, polygonal look, snowy backgrounds, snaking, downhill courses, and solid feel. But this one is supposed to be cool — it's

got "attitude," with a physical snowboard to stand on, instead of skis. A kid would like it because the character looks like a teenage boy, who, when launching off jumps, pulls off

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rating arcade

Arcade

SMOKIN' GUNS

Gunblade NY

Publisher: Sega

Developer: Sega

With the success of its Virtua Cop series, Sega would seemingly have enough shooters to keep the throng of arcade-going shooting fans completely placated. Although Virtua Cop 2 exemplified some of Sega's smartest AI, and its 60-fps polygonal animation and anti-septic visuals are just short of breathtaking, it was Time Warner's Area 51, a less visually stunning, simplistic but captivating shooter, that stole the shooter spotlight from Sega.

Sega's answer is Gunblade New York, Virtua Cop's high-flying New York cousin, a high-voltage shooter that puts the emphasis back on blown-in stuff up, plan and simple, few elements set this game apart from the VC series, but small alterations in interface, view, and even smarter AI out a clear swath for its success.

The player has been called to save New York from terrorists who are blowing the citadel to pieces. One of two players can play by taking control of a special helicopter that zips through urban landscapes. And while players can't control the copter's movement, which is an element that gamers would probably want to handle (like in Namco's Time Crisis), there is still so much gameplay, enabling control of the copter would only confuse gamers. Players are blessed with satisfying, mounted sub-machine guns loaded with infinite ammunition. What's even cooler is that every single object — windows in skyscrapers, trees, statues, taxis — can be shot into shatters, a slight detail that somehow pleases every person who plays the game.

What the developers have done to make the game more challenging, and to counter the superiority of your heavy arsenal, is to make the enemies super human and super clever: clusters of them will appear attacking all at once, and you must manage a sort of democratic equality of gunfire to slay alive. The AI actually



Gunblade's many aerial perspectives and its killer machines guns set it apart from other arcade shooters

reacts to your shots but they don't die after one shot. Instead they jump, run, and attempt to dodge your fire, while the copter whirrs around for the best angle. The unlimited ammo and resilient, smart enemy AI make for pleasing and inspired gameplay, different enough than Virtua Cop to set Gunblade NY apart. And finally, at the level's end, in both the easy and difficult modes, the last boss are Japanese-looking Gundam Robots, which blast heat-seeking missiles at your craft without remorse.

Gunblade NY is a good, fun Sega shooter, something gamers have almost come to expect from the Japanese giant. But it's Namco that has set the shooting game on fire with Time Crisis, and until Virtua Cop 3 appears — hopefully with movement control equal to or better than Namco's seminal co-op — Gunblade NY may help to lower the flames, but it certainly won't put them out.

Rating: ****



Alpine Surfer is not only the only snowboarding game around, it looks and plays great

flips, helicopters, and olices, and because the snowboard, in its own way, symbolizes the younger snowboarding generation.

The problem with Surfer, however, is that when you finish playing, you feel like there should have been more. The novelty of video skiing has worn off, and Surfer handily captures the radeateness of snowboarding in a way the player can control. Players can't cut across the lip of a snowy bank, they can't cut

wide swaths across a slope sprang snow in skiers faces, and they can't control the coolest part of the gameplay — the jumping moves themselves. If the developers had taken the game further, it would have been great. As it is, Alpine Surfer — the only snowboarding coin-op in the world — is just a good one.

Rating: ***

Skull Fang

Publisher: Data East

Developer: Data East

To best cover the essence of Data East's new Skull Fang, we refer to what Gertrude Stein once said (paraphrasing just a bit), "a shooter is a shooter is a shooter."

Why doesn't someone re-create the aging genre? Skull Fang depends on all of the standard ingredients for its recipe: 12 power-ups, ranging from the Cluster and Vulcan Cannon to the 5 unit; four different crates; and four plots.

A few variations in the formula set this apart slightly: The Chase mode enables players to increase and decrease their

speed, and the air brakes, and back and side thrust moves help ease the dull pain of dodging and shooting the entire enemy army. But essentially, what we've got here is a shooter in the most generic sense, it's as if there was no there there.

Rating: **

Soul Edge Version II

Publisher: Namco

Developer: Namco

Next Generation got a sneak preview of Soul Edge at the September '95 AMOA in New Orleans, and marveled at its look and playability. Version II is an update, not a sequel, and is thus full of enhancements to the original, but it's not a major new game. It adds two new characters to master: Cervantes De Leon, a red-eyed, long-haired pirate with two curved bloody swords, and Hwang Sung Kyung, an Asian sword fighter, which brings the character list to 10, and keeps the shine on an excellent fighter.

The update also brings with it a special new move that enables the characters the ability to

knock his or her opponent's weapon from their hands for a few seconds, leaving them vulnerable.

There is still the slight control delay, but character movement is still fluid and seamless, and the trailing slashes of light in the wake of weapon movement is as gorgeous as ever.

Rating: ****

SORRY!

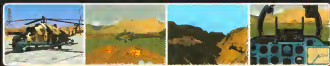
No new games were made available for review this month on the following systems

Virtual Boy

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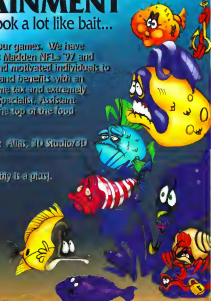
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l e t t e r s

Write away, sir

Why is Nintendo 64 being released on a Monday? Don't they know they're going to get millions of complaints from angry parents saying "My son skipped school just to get your damn system." Wouldn't it be wiser to release it on a Saturday?

igsotti@aol.com

It's cool. All the teachers will be out picking up their own Nintendo 64s anyway.

Why can't Nintendo, Sega, and Sony do what the organizers of DVD have done, the computer industry has done, as well as the VCR industry? I'm talking about using one format.

It troubles me to think that for World Series Baseball I have to go out and buy a Saturn, for NFL GameDay I have to go get a PlayStation, and for Mario I have to buy a N64. Think about if you had a Sony VCR as opposed to a Mitsubishi, and had to buy only those tapes compatible with the Sony VCR! These game companies are shooting themselves in the foot by using numerous platforms instead of one unified one.

DVD wouldn't have survived with two formats, so how can the gaming industry survive with three or better?

MikeDaneR@aol.com

You should talk to Trip Hawkins. You can reach him at The 3DO Company in Redwood City, CA.

My brother recently bought *Mega Men X3*. We were very relieved

once we had gone through the whole game without finding any swearing, since there was some in *MM7*. We were stuck on the boss for a while and finally beat him only to find Mega Man yell out "D'nnn!"

Now some very good games have had this problem on the PC, such as the Wing Commander series. Even *Descent* had to add in the one word in the opening sequence!

I would buy many of those games except for the constant swearing. I am writing this letter to try to stop this, and I will be sending these out to other companies and organizations with which I have this trouble.

After all, how many people would send in a letter like this one complaining that there should be no swearing in a game? So why would you include a single swear word in the entire game? Do people buy games for their swearing? No. Timothy Kish, a (normal!) teenager who is fed up with this and wants answers. SilverHik1@aol.com

We think that you're being a little sensitive, Timothy.

After reading your piece on joysticks in the May issue (*NG 17*), I was reminded of an article I saw in a videogame magazine a few years back. The article told how to build your own joystick for the ColecoVision that was supposed to resemble the set-up on an arcade cabinet. The one detail that stands out in my mind was that you were supposed to use BMX bike grips to make the

joystick handle...

I was wanting to do the same thing for PlayStation, but instead of using old bicycle parts, I wanted to use the authentic buttons and ball-end sticks from classic game machines. Is this idea even a remote possibility?

J.P. Block

jason_p_block@amoco.com

Any ideas? Anyone?



Handlebars for your PlayStation? Hey, whatever they can come up with next...

Oh my god! Call in the cows, pull on those parkas, Hell has frozen over! Next Generation actually broke its policy and gave a Neo-Geo game more than two stars, and fighters no less!

Now to figure out what happened, it can't be that you've actually played the games, can it? Galen Tatsuo Komatsu gkomatsu@hawaii.edu

All right, all right. That's enough.

Ghis Crawford's May column rates an excellent point about

saving/reloading in many games today. It's really annoying to be able to save my progress right before a dangerous area. Now that statement might sound ridiculous at first, but think about it: You're playing a 3D game, and cautiously you wander deep into the alien nest. There's a big door in front of you, and you have a gut feeling that a nasty enemy is waiting behind it. So what do you do? Open the door, brace yourself, and get ready for the action that lies behind it?

Nope. You save your game. The moment you enter your filename and push "enter" you have effectively: 1. Disrupted the flow of the game, thereby disrupting your immersion into the game world. 2. Killed any suspense that might have been gripping you. 3. Killed any sense of danger or excitement.

Why do you think Japanese RPGs restrict you from saving freely in dangerous areas (like caves)? Because the programmers are incompetent! No. They must have known that not letting you save anytime increases the immersion, suspense, and excitement by more than ten fold.

Terry Lin

tlin@servnet.com

Agreed. If a game is truly based on skill and not luck, then obstacles can be faced and beaten on numerous occasions, not just once.

Nice to see some popular press for force-feedback joysticks (FFJ) and force feedback in general. In Get a

corresponding

grip joysticks past, present, and future, **NG 17**.

There have been a lot of talented people working on force-feedback over the years; sadly, your article didn't mention any of this interesting history. I've had the pleasure of working on a few projects in this area, but I was only one of many...

At the Atari Cambridge Research labs (behind MIT) in the early 1980s, Max Behensky, my brother Peter, and I built a couple of 2D force feedback joysticks; my part was the mechanics. These were real "wrist wreckers" — the more powerful one could push several pounds and shake as fast as 20 Hz. These Fjfs were interfaced to Lisp Machines, the state-of-the-art in \$100,000 "personal computers" back then. Some simple physics simulations and games were programmed and many visitors enjoyed playing with them. I also remember building a motorized steering wheel, but we didn't get the car physics sim running to really use it properly at that time.

Subsequently we also built an FFJ for Margaret Minzky at the MIT Media Lab; there is a picture of it in *The Media Lab, Inventing the Future at MIT* by Stewart Brand, Penguin Books, 1987. A lot of research was done at the Media Lab on FF and there is a nice history in Margaret's PhD thesis, "Computational Haptics: The Sandpaper System for Synthesizing Texture for a Force-Feedback Display", MIT, 1995. Margaret also worked on FF at the Atari lab in the early '80s.

A bit later in the '80s, the Atari arcade game, *Hard Drive*, came out. This featured a good automobile physics model and accurate force-feedback steering. The follow-up game, *Road Driver*, may still be one of the best car simulators around, even years after it was designed — I still play the one I have at home!

Max and I are currently part of the team working on "the next driving game" at a start-up in Silicon Valley — it will include a better car model, and of course, force-feedback steering. Force-feedback is a lot of fun —

I hope that it becomes available at the consumer level so more people can enjoy it.

Doug Milliken
bd427@freenet.buffalo.edu
Milliken Research,
Buffalo, NY

Thanks for your letter:

In issue 18 on page 125 where Top Gun for the PC is rated, the article states that "it doesn't fly like an F-14 Hornet." I am curious to know which of your reviewers is the ex-Navy aviator who can say this with such authority.

Mikar Products
mikar@lu.net

We could tell you our reviewer's name, but then, of course, we'd have to kill you.

Just thought I'd clear up your gross mis-characterization of the proposed "Super CD" format in your DVD-does-everything feature, in **NG 18**.

Without getting needlessly technical, the Super CD format does not refer to a DVD that can contain several hours of digital audio. While there is a certain appeal to that idea, none of the major recording labels have much of an interest in promoting such a format. Few artists even manage to fill up the current CD audio format.

Rather, the proposed Super CD format refers to roughly the same amount of audio stored at a much higher sampling rate and possibly containing more than two channels. While nonaudiophiles may buy into the notion that present day CDs perfectly reproduce recorded sound, those of us who care about such things have long been frustrated with the technical limitations of sound sampled in accordance with the 16-bit, 44.1 KHz standard established in the early 1980s. Some record companies (Sony, Mobile Fidelity) have experimented with 20-bit mastering techniques to compensate for these shortfalls.

Anyone interested in this topic would be well advised to

seek out recent issues of Stereophile, which have devoted lots of space on this topic.

Michael H. Gruenglas
mike-g@panix.com

Thank you Stereophile, for doing so much work. (So we don't have to.)

If Saturn has three processors and PlayStation has one, and Sega has been in the videogame market longer than Sony, and PlayStation games like *Castle Arno* (Tashiro) and *Wipout* (both big hits) are now being ported to the Saturn — shouldn't this be helping the Saturn's sales?

It sounds to me like Saturn should be the one winning the race so far, not PlayStation.

Peter Neely
pneely@mail.com,
missouri.edu

If only life was so straightforward, eh Peter?

Your usual responsible editorial policy seems to have come to a sudden halt with your interview of Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates (Gates on Games, **NG 18**). The interviewer seems to have steered the subject in



No, the Bill Gates interview was not an April Fool's prank.

one direction: Microsoft's supposed juggernaut entering the computer gaming industry. I have combed the article over and over again looking for some sign that this is a late April Fool's Day prank, but alas, I have

concluded that the sentiments are genuine.

Lawrence Paul
Long Island, New York
Nerds4life@aol.com

Oops, you know what Lawrence? You're right. We should have spent our two hours with Bill Gates talking about gardening. Or, no, maybe the mating habits of whales.

I'm writing to congratulate you guys on an excellent article on Microsoft in **NG 18**. But I'm curious to know what the other side is up to — the often overlooked Apple Co.

DOOPE@aol.com

Next month you'll know more.

Thanks for the tips on getting into the industry. I recently graduated from art college and found a sweet position creating and animating as a 2D and 3D artist.

Ms Rocka A Malik
JVKP17A@prodigy.com

Our pleasure.

Could you please send me a description of every videogame system ever made and the year it was distributed. I have a report due this Wednesday and I can't find a thing on it. So please send me this info. Thanks.

MStieber@aol.com

Um...

It's amusing to see that people are so concerned with gameplay. I buy games so my friends and relatives can enjoy themselves. I don't have fun playing any game by myself so when I do play I want other people to be in a state of constant amazement at the game's detail and complexity. Companies are concentrating too much on gameplay and forgetting about detail.

luckey@pacifier.com

You see? It really does take all sorts.



Next Month

The forgotten game machine

Apple computers are the game-playing platform of choice for a small but dedicated hard-core group of U.S. gamers. But most people still prefer a console or a PC.

Why is this? And how does Apple plan to change peoples' minds?

Next month Apple exclusively reveals its plans to **Next Generation**.

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