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5 ISSUE

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ARTIFICIAL intelligence

Another year, another slew of sports games. For the past few years, sports gamers, mainstream and hardcore alike, have consistently bought each new incarnation of their favorite sports titles without fail.

So what exactly are the improvements between each new version? What the game boxes and press releases will tell you are the obvious things that marketing people parked in office cubes will tell you—new rosters, new, "improved" graphics and 20 fantastic, in-your-face end-zone celebrations that range from punching an end-zone cushion like a boxer to crotch-grabbing. Somehow, lost in all of these superfluous features that supposedly make sports games excellent, are the issues of making each title as realistic and intelligent as possible. You see, lately, most game manufacturers have all but dismissed the possibility of having a video game think and react in the same manner as the sport that it seeks to re-create, much less making it smart enough to beat a decent human opponent without blatantly cheating. Any dedicated sports gamer who has regularly outscored his or her computer competition by enormous margins knows this to be true. These same people also probably won't be shocked to know that almost every sports game's AI is basically a retread of the AI engine from the previous year's edition.

Of course, there are always exceptions to the rule, but they are few and far between. So the question must be posed: Why are the sports games we are playing today still no "smarter" than the ones we played years before? The primary reason is the tight scheduling that producers of the games must adhere to due to the predictable, yearly release of a sports title. There can be very few delays, as the product must ship within optimal marketing windows that are wide open during the sport's respective season. AI often is placed low on the priority list for many reasons. First, it's very time-consuming, and each adjustment takes a great deal of testing to perfect. Producers under pressures to make deadlines are more inclined not to touch something that is "not broken" rather than put their career on the line by making substantial AI changes that could ultimately result in enormous delays. Secondly, because AI is something that is not visible until days or weeks after you play or purchase a game, it is less apt to get immediate attention. You can't look at the back of a box or an ad and "see" the game's exquisite intelligence.

However, having a "dumb" sports title isn't always by design or time constraints. Frankly, some companies simply don't have the knowledge necessary to make an intelligent game. Many of the producers and designers of sports games know little beyond what they hear from their favorite television commentators. Even worse, sometimes the people behind the games don't even care about sports.

You would think that possessing knowledgeable people wouldn't be a problem, with the amount of money that is thrown to well-known celebrities and athletes in order to have their name endorse a game. It would make sense that these people who are highly profiled within the game and on its packaging would play an active role in the development of the product to make sure that their smiling face doesn't grace the title screen of a game that they would be embarrassed to show their friends. Even worse, some companies have the know-how and time to make a game realistic, but are afraid to because they hold the belief that making a sports game intelligent and realistic will make it unattractive to mainstream buyers who won't find it as easy to hop in immediately and throw 40-yard passes down the field with their eyes closed.

Unfortunately, until an ambitious company steps forward and produces a console game with excellent AI, there will always be sports games that play well as two-player games. However, these games will never hold much value to the solitary player who wants to have a challenging experience without having to hook up to the Internet or go hunting for some warm-blooded competition.

—Kraig Kujawa, Assistant Editor

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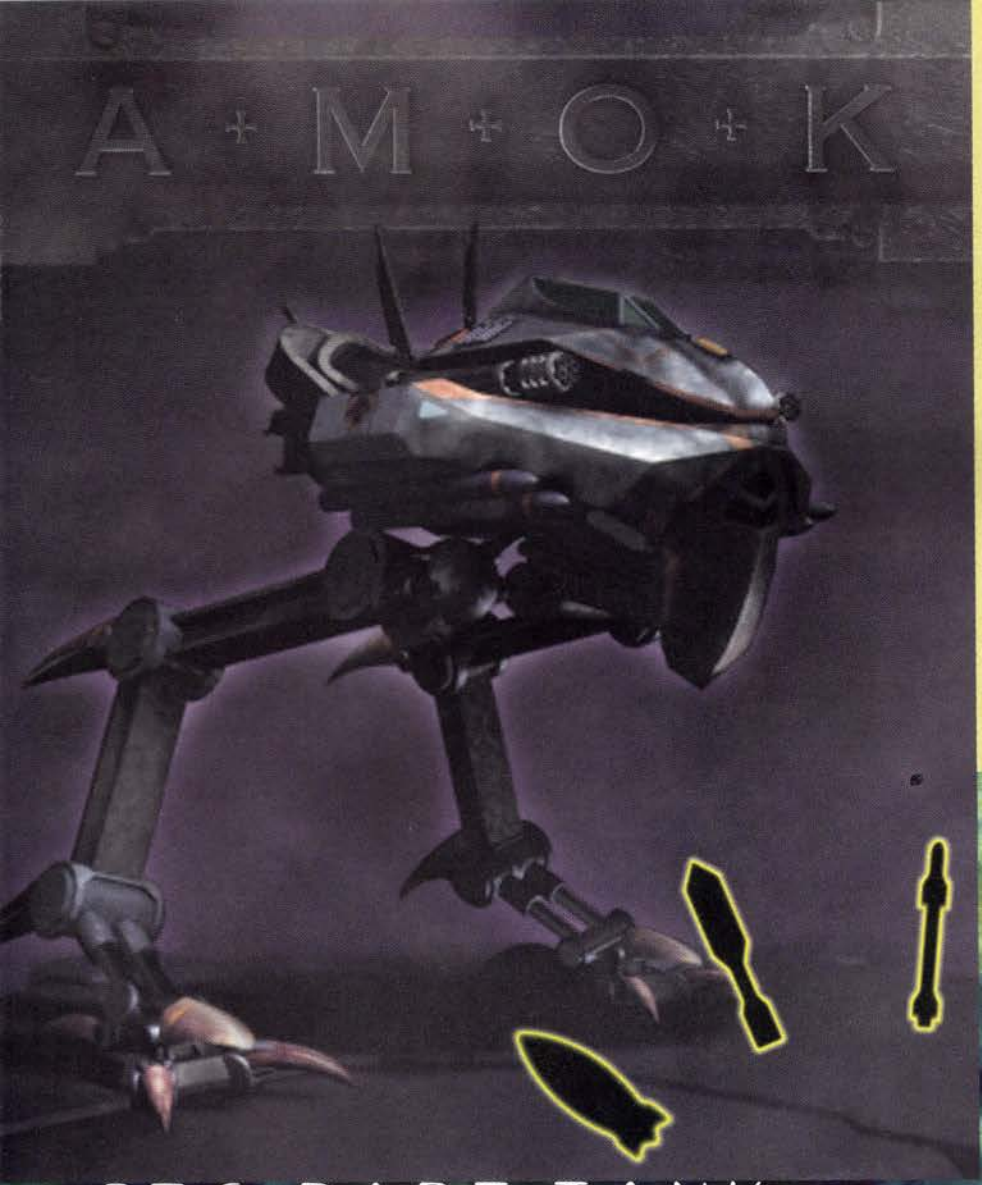

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According to the government it is preposterous to believe that such a game as AREA 51 exists. Concerning allegations of a top secret experiment gone bad, resulting in mutating alien creatures, authorities were unavailable for comment. Unidentified sources state AREA 51 has developed advanced technologies of mysterious nature: 3D rendered graphics, live digitized action and stop frame animation. All have been denied by high level officials. As for a home invasion of the #1 ARCADE GAME, the Pentagon asserts there is absolutely no documentation pertaining to this rumor.

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exist."

AREA 51

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MATURE M AGES 17+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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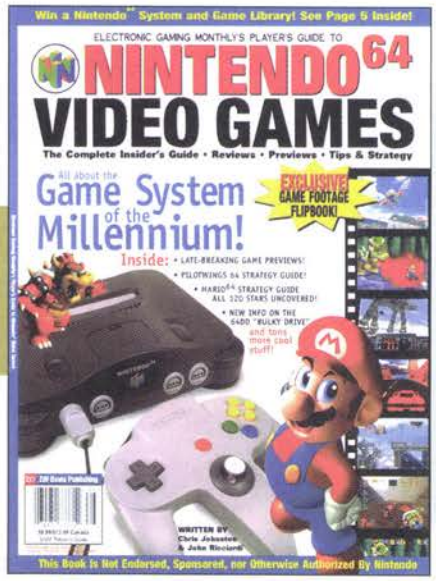
Inside The Nintendo64

It's Finally Here!

Electronic Gaming Monthly's Player's Guide to Nintendo64 Video Games is the most complete and up-to-date guide available for Nintendo64 fans, with extensive game coverage, hot information and tons of cool previews!



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Play nice... and remember to wear your helmets...

The Madden NFL '97 cover illustration was rendered especially for IG by Greg Jobes and Donnie Worley of Tiburon Entertainment, courtesy of EA Sports.

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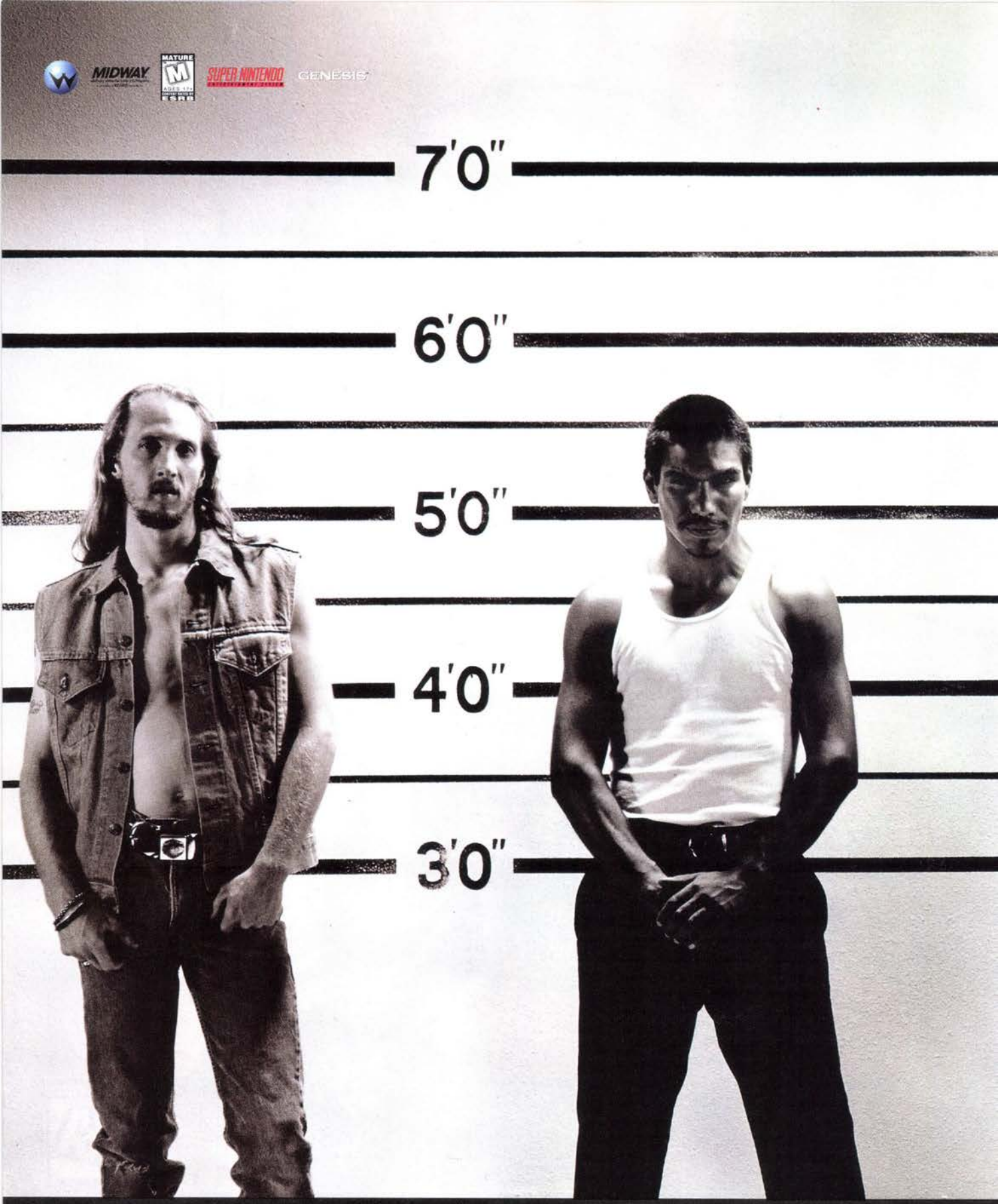

THE BIGGEST AND BADDEST 16-BIT MK EVER is on the street. 5 new backgrounds. 8 new playable characters including Kitana, Jade, Scorpion

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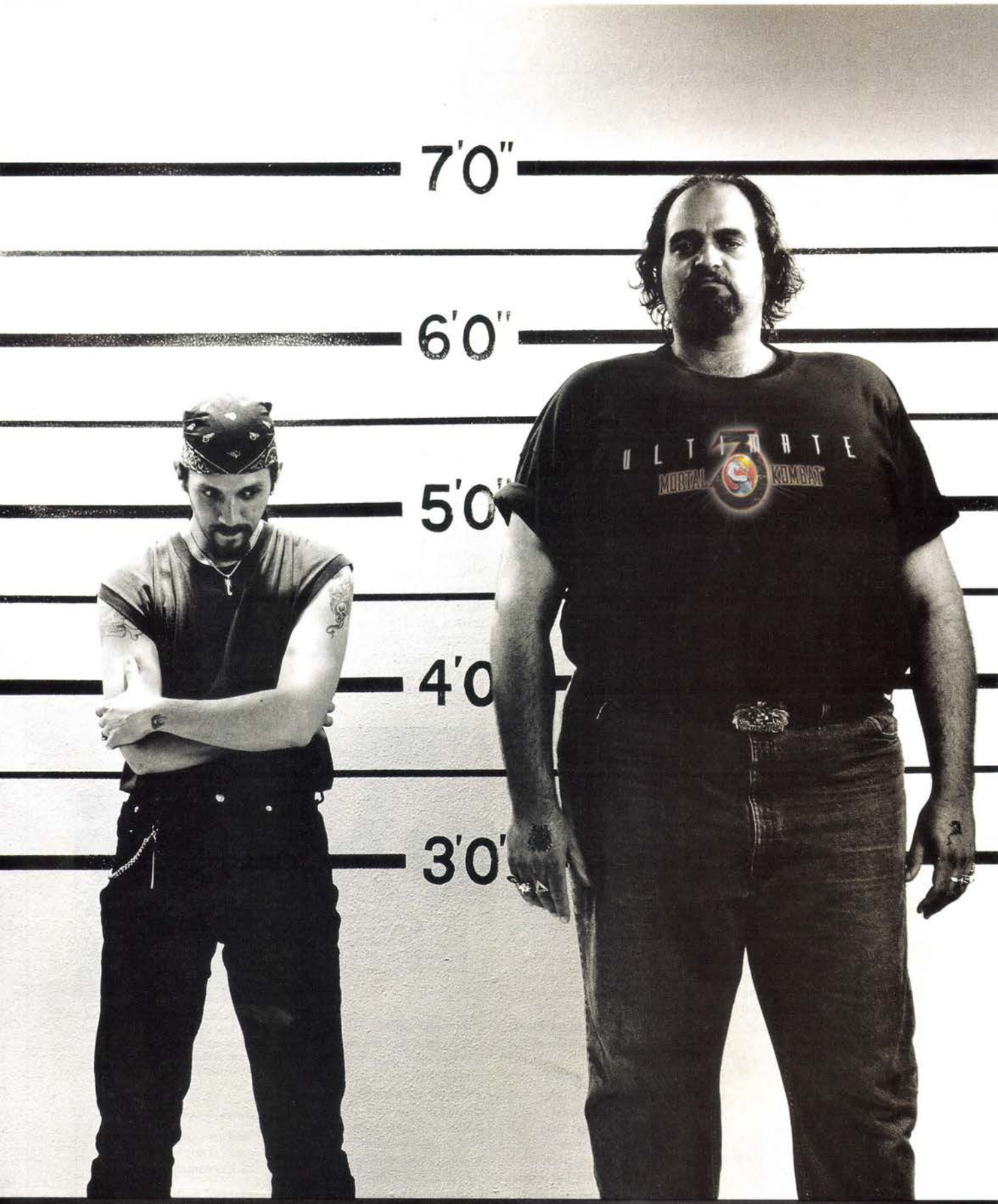

and Reptile from MK2. 3 modes of play. Selectable ending sequences. And the ability to play as Rain and Noob Saibot. Watch your back.

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There is no other way to put this: I hate Sony! On Sept. 9, 1995 I purchased a Sony PlayStation; since then it's been all headaches. A month later my PS broke down. I found out from a certified electrician that its motordrive needed to be replaced. This would cost around $100 to $130. The electrician also told me that he wouldn't touch the machine (as well as all other repair shops). After contacting Sony, I found out that they'd clean my PS for $65 (regardless if I wanted it done or not) then contact me if further repairs (meaning more money) needed to be done. Being a loyal gamer I instead purchased another PS for $300 since the motordrive would be $130 and the automatic cleaner charge of $65 would amount to spending $195 on an already-troubled machine. Well guess what...games are freezing up on my second PS! It's no coincidence that this second PS is also going haywire right after its warranty has expired! After cleaning the system, the software CDs and contacting Sony again, I've pretty much determined to expose Sony for its faulty systems (that's why I'm writing you guys). I'm also shaking my head now 'cause my friend bought Triple Play '97 and it came with multiple scratches on it! What's up with Sony?! To make it even worse, his memory card isn't saving games for him; so he's gotta get a new one. He still likes Sony, but for me the damage is done.

This little nitpicking may not mean much to Sony users who haven't had problems; but listen to this next one. I own a Sony VCR and the Eject button is starting to wear out. Movie tapes don't eject properly, which causes me to have to pry them out of the machine! Yeah, Sony's name sure means quality these days.

In your June issue, a gamer by the name of Aaron Jukes wrote in about his two PSes that freeze when playing games—gee, I wonder what's happening there? Why don't you give him a call, Sony, like the one I never received when you said you'd be contacting me about my problems.

What really burns me is that I picked up an issue of another publication and saw a letter that was sent in by Sony's Marketing VP, Andrew House. In the letter he states that Sony's success was greater than the reported researching numbers had shown. In all their glory, Sony wants to write gaming mags and bask in their success while choosing to hide and ignore consumers like me who are left holding the doggie bag, so to speak.

So, instead of contacting me and giving me consumer quality, Sony chooses to write to gaming mags and dispute its success. Let me add that I'm an open-minded gamer who loves all companies. I'm not partial to Nintendo or Sega. I have a 3DO, Saturn, Super NES and two (count 'em) two faulty PlayStations. I'm not writing to you guys in an attempt to pass on a bogus story about Sony at all. This letter reflects the truth, so help me God.

I just wanna see quality, and lately Sony doesn't have it. We're the reason why game companies exist. I hope that you guys print this letter because Sony must be exposed and consumers must be warned: Sony products are indeed lacking. I'd advise careful picking of a 32-Bit machine. Sega and 3DO may not be as good and popular in the public's eye, but then again the people want something that lasts. Until then, I'll be playing Sega and Nintendo and staying away from Sony's products.

Mark Flores
Orosi, CA

[Ed: With regard to quality of the Sony hardware, you certainly have some valid points. The only "help" Sony has offered to weary consumers with regard to this mysterious defect is to turn the PlayStation upside-down in order to rectify the problem.

So far the only known cause for this mysterious phenomenon seems to be the repeated use of the "swap trick," which is very useful in playing Japanese games.

Upon closer examination of the Sony PlayStation, an inscription reads: Please turn this device upside-down in case of emergency.

I recently read an interview with the one and only Bill Gates on PC gaming. He said something to the effect that if a PC owner was paying $2,000 + for a machine, then it should be able to do EVERYTHING better than some $300 console system, and that PCs will soon be jumping that "graphics gap" to be virtually unchallenged in even that competitive field of processor capability. I also own a couple other 32-Bit systems and think that PC developers are up for one helluva challenge! So what's your people's thoughts? Is this gonna go somewhere? Thanks, just wondering.

Timothy M. Theiss
ttheiss@micron.net

[Ed.: There is no denying that between the new 3-D cards and operating system, the PC has grown exponentially in its ability to do cutting-edge, console-quality games. The quick answer is that the PC must persuade console players to play games on a desk rather than in the comfort of their living room.

The man warmly smirking at you is Bill Gates. Now that he has completed the domination of the PC operating system market, it's time for him to move on to games.

I more than anyone want the M2 to succeed, but I am also a realist. As potent as the M2 is, it's already beginning to show its age. When the M2 was scheduled to be released in September '95, my realistic wish list included 6 MBs of RAM, a quad-speed drive and an analog joystick. Now we have 8 MBs of RAM and the added possibilities of dual-power PC 602 processors and a DVD drive. Wow! absolutely incredible! However we also have processors which are quickly becoming obsolete and very poor market timing. The plain truth of the matter is that the M2 has missed the "wave." When all is said and done, the biggest obstacle that Matsushita will face is the more powerful systems that Sony and Sega will announce just before the M2 is released. I sincerely hope I'm wrong about all of this, but to me poor market timing is the largest obstacle any technological device must face. Please keep up the wonderful coverage of the M2.

James D. Brown
Greenville, NC

[Ed.: To say the handling of the M2 has been a mess with would be an understatement. One Panasonic employee described Matsushita as a large octopus, whose legs were each fighting over different facets of the M2 technology.

Matsushita is a big company and every division wants a piece of it. Between this and the software delays caused by the transition of third-party handling between 3DO and Matsushita, the M2 has faced numerous costly setbacks that may indeed ruin its chance to gain any of the console market-share. In the end, M2 technology may end up only showing up in arcades or in various high-end, consumer DVD players.

While M2 was certainly ahead of its time when it was unveiled, platforms such as the Nintendo 64 have closed the gap—and even more importantly, are in stores.

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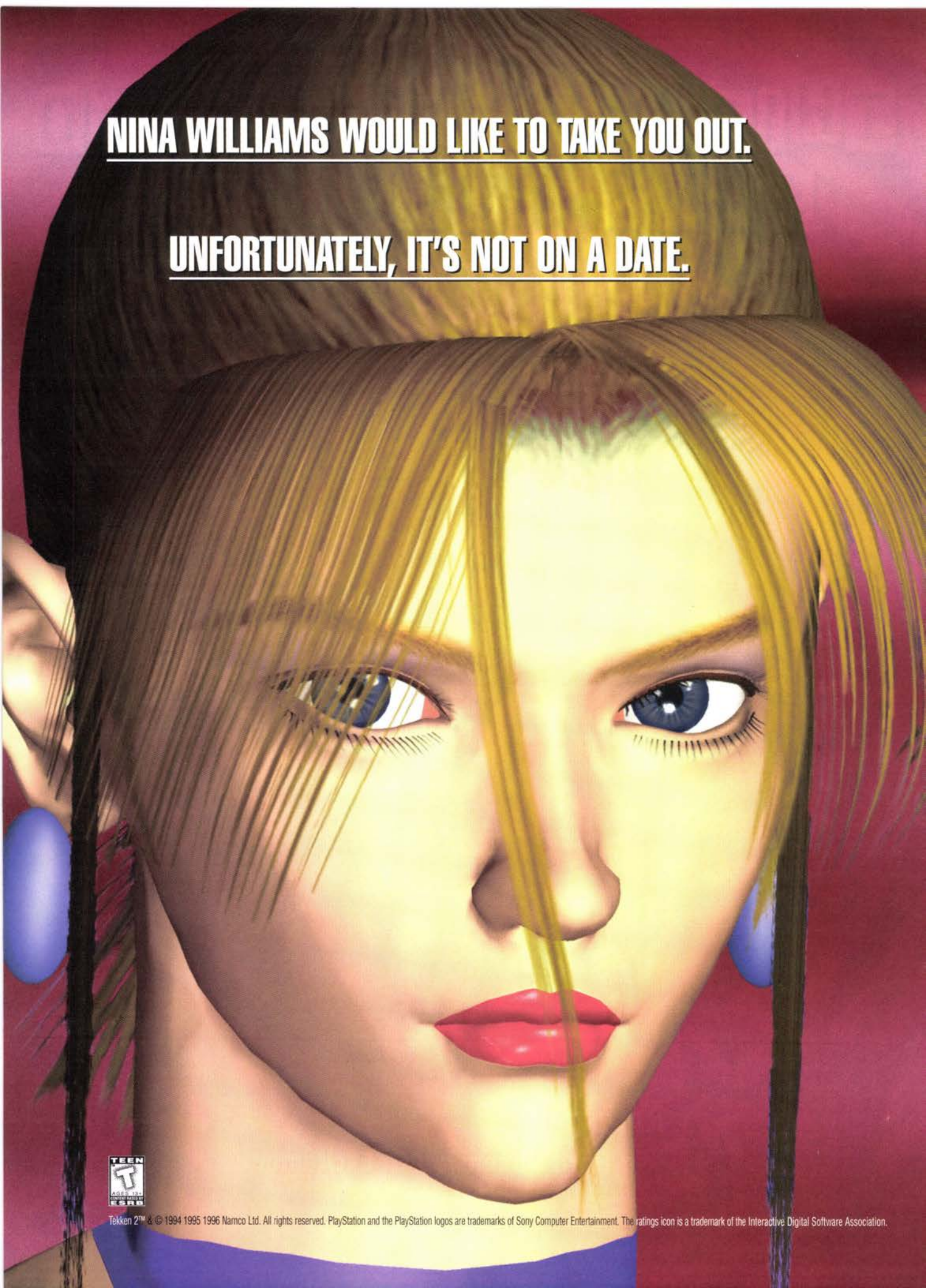
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Back to Earth

N64 Sales Frenzy Cools Down

Though the June 23 launch of the Nintendo64 (N64) in Japan exceeded all expectations, most indications suggest that N64 sales slowed considerably in the weeks following.

The opening sales of the N64 were record-breaking as hundreds of thousands of units were purchased in a matter of hours. "There were people waiting in line before the stores opened," says Perrin Kaplan, Nintendo director of corporate communications. "They had presold several hundred thousand units. That made Mr. Yamauchi (Hiroshi Yamauchi, president of Nintendo Limited) very happy."

Nintendo released the N64 into the Japanese retail channel in three limited shipments. Retailers had presold nearly 300,000 units and sold another 200,000 units immediately. A second shipment of N64s was delivered and sold out quickly as well. Trying to keep up with demand, Nintendo released a third shipment of N64s, most of which is still in the stores. Walking around the Akihabara district of Tokyo, a section of town known for electronics sales, most stores have stacks of N64s.

"The goal was to at least make sure that they were able to get some inventory into the stores by the third shipment," says Kaplan.

By all accounts, the release of the N64 was a major event covered by broadcast and print news. Mario64 posters sprang up around Tokyo, and one television station aired a game show in which children answered questions about Mario64. The show even featured a water slide race between a chubby commentator and a person dressed as a giant penguin.

In the weeks since the launch, however, Nintendo64 sales have slowed. At the time of the launch, Sony PlayStation sales dropped dramatically while Sega Saturn sales lagged behind both systems. After the N64's initial sales wave, PlayStation sales have picked up considerably. According to the Japanese press, PlayStation sales have surpassed those of the N64 by a narrow margin.

"We had a third shipment which is what you're seeing inventory-wise in the stores," says Kaplan. "Because they only have three titles, the next challenge is to make sure consumers are encouraged that more titles are coming out." The only titles available for the N64 at launch were Mario64, PilotWings 64 and Shogi, a Japanese strategy game that is not scheduled for release in the United States.

In an interview with the *New York Times*, Yamauchi stated that Nintendo had sold 750,000 N64s and an equal number of Mario64 cartridges. He admitted personal disappointment that PilotWings 64 had not sold as well.

Sega and Sony Release Classics at Bargain Prices

Though they have not made formal announcements, both Sony and Sega are preparing to release several of last year's PlayStation and Saturn hits as "classics software."

According to several insiders, both companies will price the games between $26 and $29. If this is true, presumably games like Warhawk, for the PlayStation, and Virtua Cop, for the Saturn, will be available at half their original cost.

Selling discounted "classic" software makes sense for both Sony and Sega. With

SALE

DISCOUNT

manufacturing costs of around $3, republishing older games at half price will give additional life to solid titles while still providing an excellent profit margin. It will also delineate the advantages of publishing games on CD-ROM rather than cartridges. Since the cost of manufacturing cartridges for the Nintendo64 is around $30, Nintendo is unlikely to release discounted software.

Apparently the idea of "classic" discounted software does not appeal to third-party developers who complain that it will cut into their sales. "Why would somebody want to pay $60 for a new football game when they can get GameDay '96 for $26? Why even bother with GameDay '97 for that matter?" asked a spokesperson from one third-party developer.

A spokesperson from another company commented that this discounting strategy could hurt Sega and Sony as well. "Once the public gets used to paying $26 for games, they may not want to pay $50 for new titles."

VectorMan Goes to Hollywood

Los Angeles-based Ideal Entertainment Inc. has recently announced plans to create a full-length animated motion picture based on VectorMan, the character that fueled Sega's 16-Bit hero/hit game. According to Sega spokesperson Terry Tang, VectorMan is a computer-animated science-fiction action film scheduled for release in the latter part of next year.

"A team of acclaimed digital effects producers from the current hit *Independence Day* are overseeing the *Toy Story*-like rendering of characters and environments," according to a press release on the game.

According to Tang, the executive producer of *VectorMan* will be John Shapiro, who has produced large-budget motion pictures such as *Richie Rich*.

When the *VectorMan* movie is released, it will join the questionable ranks of such other games-turned-into-movies as *Cloak and Dagger, Super Mario Brothers, Street Fighter, Double Dragon* and *Mortal Kombat*.

NICE PUNCH.

Unfortunately, he has an iron jaw (and a rocket launcher).

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- Hundreds of deadly weapon combinations!
- Over 100 robotic killers to challenge you!
- Intense split-screen mode for 2-Player head-to-head battle!

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KOKOPELI digital studios™ http://www.thq.com

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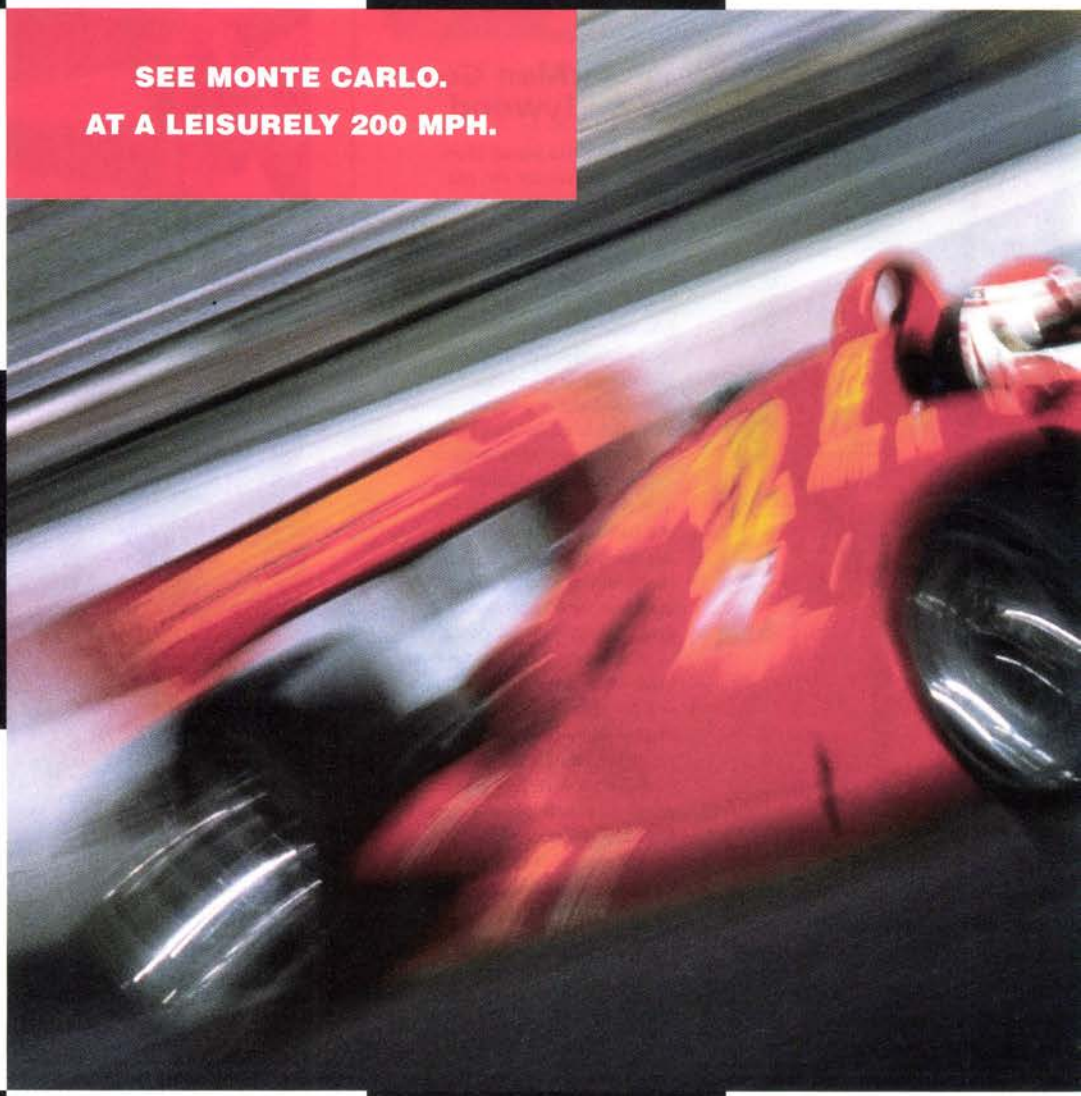
Race with 35 of the fastest, most maniacally-aggressive drivers on the paved planet. (The only thing you'll lack is a fireproof body suit.)

26 cars perfectly mirror their real-world counterparts. If you plow into a sidewall, you better count on a pit stop and collision repair.

SEE MONTE CARLO.
AT A LEISURELY 200 MPH.



Guitar gurus Steve Vai and Joe Satriani provide the high-octane road tunes. (Playable in mono, stereo, Dolby Surround or Q-Sound.)

Trees, buildings, grandstands and surrounding scenery added from over 100 hours of video footage. (Sorry, winner's circle bimbos not included.)

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Orchid Prepares to Launch Voodoo Powered 3-D Card

Orchid Technology, which is a subsidiary of Micronics Computers, is set to launch their next-generation "Righteous 3-D" card onto the market for a retail price of $299.

No firm launch date had been set at press time, but an Orchid representative stated that the launch will probably be postponed from late August to late September in an effort to "launch the hardware with as many quality pack-in products as possible."

The Voodoo chipset has impressed ever since it was showcased at E³ in May. Some developers were noting that the card was slightly more powerful than the highly touted Nintendo⁶⁴

As of mid-August, Orchid had signed a number of deals with several companies with the key players and supporters being Microsoft and Interplay. Special deals worked with the companies yielded 3Dfx-enhanced "trial" versions of Interplay's blockbuster title, Descent II and Microsoft's unreleased games

Orchid has a lot to prove to companies as every other 3-D card before it has failed. If the rumors that Quake will jump on board are true, Orchid's quest for a "killer-app" will be complete.

Hellbender and Monster Truck Rally. Other lesser-known games are also to be bundled in with the card such as Whiplash and VR Soccer.

Although most of these titles are noteworthy, the rumor opening eyes in the industry is that id Software's mega-hit Quake may lend early support to the card, or could potentially be bundled with the hardware at launch. When asked about these rumors, an Orchid representative would only confirm that "there are ongoing talks between id and Orchid concerning Quake support." Additionally, other information has been posted on the Internet by several id employees stating that "The 3Dfx chipset is the best out there for Quake."

HOT Top 15

Top 15 Arcade Games

1. **Tekken 2** Namco
2. **Golden Tee 3D Golf** Incred. Tech
3. **Bust-A-Move Again** Taito
4. **Metal Slug** SNK
5. **Raiden DX** Fabtek
6. **Dungeons & Dragons '96** Capcom
7. **Marvel Super Heroes** Capcom
8. **Soul Edge Version II** Namco
9. **Toshinden 2** Capcom
10. **Run & Gun 2** Konami
11. **Virtual On** Sega
12. **Street Fighter Alpha 2** Capcom
13. **19XX** Capcom
14. **Striker 1945** Worldwide Video
15. **Ms. Pac-Man** Namco

Current Release Top 15

1. **International Track and Field** Konami/ PlayStation
2. **Quake** (Shareware) id/PC
3. **Decathlete** Sega
4. **Ultimate MK3** Williams/Saturn
5. **Baku Baku** Sega/Saturn
6. **Bust-A-Move 2** Acclaim/ PlayStation
7. **NiGHTS** Sega/Saturn
8. **Iron Storm** Working Designs/ Saturn
9. **Night Warriors: DarkStalkers' Revenge** Capcom/Saturn
10. **Super Mario RPG** Nintendo/ Super NES
11. **The Legend of Oasis** Sega/Saturn
12. **DarkStalkers: the Night Warriors** Capcom/ PlayStation
13. **Street Fighter Alpha** Capcom/ PS & Saturn
14. **NBA Shoot Out** Sony CE/ PlayStation
15. **Panzer Dragoon Zwei** Sega/Saturn

Most-Wanted Top 15

1. **Super Mario⁶⁴** Nintendo/ Nintendo⁶⁴
2. **Tetrisphere** Nintendo/ Nintendo⁶⁴
3. **Street Fighter Alpha 2** Capcom/ PS & Saturn
4. **WipeOut XL** Psygnosis/ PlayStation
5. **PilotWings 64** Nintendo/ Nintendo⁶⁴
6. **Tomb Raider** Eidos/ PS & Saturn
7. **Spider** BMG Interactive/ PS & Saturn
8. **Final Fantasy VII** Square/ PlayStation
9. **Dark Savior** Sega/Saturn
10. **Tobal No. 1** Square/ PlayStation
11. **Fighting Vipers** Sega/Saturn
12. **Daytona USA C.C. Edition** Sega/Saturn
13. **Andretti Racing** EA Sports/ PlayStation
14. **Formula 1** Psygnosis/ PlayStation
15. **Sonic Blast** Sega/Saturn

IG's Editors' Top 15 Most Played

1. **Super Mario⁶⁴** Nintendo/ Nintendo⁶⁴
2. **Saturn Bomberman** Hudson/Saturn
3. **Andretti Racing '97** EA Sports/ PlayStation
4. **Madden NFL 97** EA Sports/ Saturn/PS
5. **Victory Goal 96** Sega/Saturn
6. **Tempest 2000** Interplay/ Saturn/PS
7. **Quake** id/PC CD-ROM
8. **NiGHTS** Sega/Saturn
9. **Street Fighter Zero 2** Capcom/ Saturn/PS
10. **Dragon Force** Working Designs/ Saturn
11. **Black Dawn** Virgin/Saturn
12. **PilotWings 64** Nintendo/ Nintendo⁶⁴
13. **NBA Live 96** EA Sports/ PlayStation
14. **Tokimeki Memorial** Konami/Saturn/PS
15. **Club Drive** Atari/Jaguar

(If you believe that last one, let us tell you another...)

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60 3-D rotatable chambers: 20 multi-player action chambers and 40 one-player strategy chambers

A variety of obstacles such as spikes, trap doors, lava pits, and other deadly surprises make each chamber unique

Intense multi-player mode with up to four competitors, solo against computer opponents, or solo against the clock

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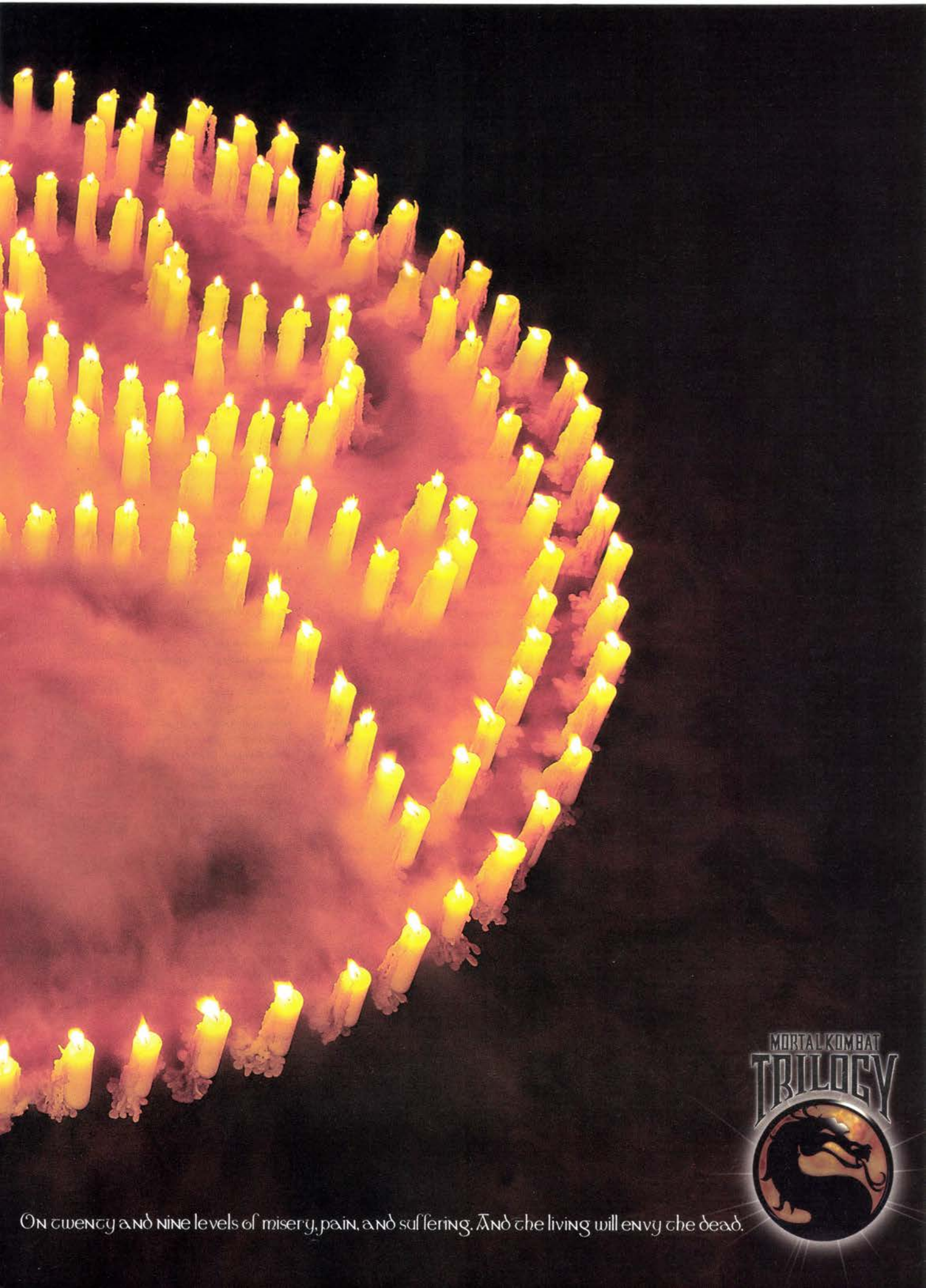
And on that day, that which was promised will return. For twenty and six shall gather.


MORTAL KOMBAT
TRILOGY
On twenty and nine levels of misery, pain, and suffering. And the living will envy the dead.

SEPTEMBER

PilotWings 64 [Nintendo]
Super Mario™ [Nintendo]

OCTOBER

Mortal Kombat Trilogy [Williams]
WaveRace 64 [Nintendo]

NOVEMBER

Cruis'n USA [Nintendo]
Killer Instinct Gold [Nintendo]
NBA Hang Time [Williams]
Turok: Dinosaur Hunter [Acclaim]
Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey [Williams]

4TH QUARTER / ANNOUNCED TITLES

Blast Corps [Nintendo]
Body Harvest [Nintendo]
Buggie Boogie [Nintendo]
Creator [Nintendo]
Dark Rift [Vic Tokai]
DooM 64 [Williams]
F-ZERO 64 [Nintendo]
FIFA Soccer '97 [Electronic Arts]
Freak Boy [Virgin]
GoldenEye 007 [Nintendo]
Ken Griffey Jr. 64 [Nintendo]
Kirby's Air Ride [Nintendo]
The Legend of Zelda 64 [Nintendo/64DD]
Mario Kart 64 [Nintendo]
Mission: Impossible [Ocean]
Monster Dunk [Mindscape]
Robotech: Crystal Dreams [Gametek]
Silicon Valley [BMG Interactive]
StarFox 64 [Nintendo]
Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire [Nintendo]
Tetrisphere [Nintendo]
Top Gear Rally [Kemco]
Top Gun: A New Adventure [Spectrum Holobyte]
Ultra Combat [GT Interactive]
Ultra Descent [Interplay]
War Gods [Williams]
Yoshi's Island 64 [Nintendo]

nintendo 64

RECENT RELEASES

Adidas Power Soccer [Psygnosis]
Alone in the Dark II [T*HQ]
Aquanaut's Holiday [Sony CEA]
Bedlam [GT Interactive]
Beyond the Beyond [Sony CEA]
Big Bass World Champ [HOT-B]
Bogey: Dead 6 [Sony CEA]
Carnage Heart [Sony CEA]
Cheesy [Ocean]
Chronicles of the Sword [Psygnosis]
Crime Wave [Eidos]
Darknet [American Softworks]
Die Hard Trilogy [FOX Interactive]
Impact Racing [JVC]
International Track & Field [Konami]
Johnny Bazookatone [Eidos]
Jumping Flash! 2 [Sony CEA]
Marvel Super Heroes [Capcom]
MVP Baseball [Data East]
Namco Museum Vol. 1 [Namco]
Project: Horned Owl [Sony CEA]
Project Overkill [Konami]
Raw Pursuit [Impact Racing]
Robo Pit [T*HQ]
Rocket Jockey [Rocket Science Games]
Sentient [Psygnosis]
SimCity 2000: Special Edition [Maxis]
Star Winder [Mindscape]
Steel Harbinger [Mindscape]
Storm [American Softworks]
The Final Round [Konami]
Topps MVP Baseball '96 [Data East]
Ultimate MK3 [Williams]
Wetlands [New World]
Strike Point [American Technos]
Team 57 Goman [Coconuts]
Tecmo Golf [Tecmo]
The Adventures of Lomax in Lemmingland [Psygnosis]*
Time Commando [Activision]
VR Pool [Interplay]

SEPTEMBER 1996

4X4 Gears & Guts [American Softworks]
Bubsy 3-D [Accolade]
Crash Bandicoot [Sony CEA]
Darknet [American Softworks]
FIFA Soccer '97 [Electronic Arts]
Final DOOM [Williams]
Fox Hunt [Capcom]
Lethal Enforcers 1&2 [Konami]
Madden NFL '97 [Electronic Arts]
Mortal Kombat Trilogy [Williams]
MVP College Football '96 [Data East]
Namco Museum Vol. 2 [Namco]
NASCAR [Sierra On-Line]
Power Pinball [Bandai Multimedia]
Powerslave [Playmates]
Revelations [Atlus]
Ridge Racer Revolution [Namco]
Soviet Strike [Electronic Arts]
Syndicate Wars [Electronic Arts]
Tecmo Stackers [Tecmo]
Tecmo Super Bowl [Tecmo]
Tekken 2 [Namco]
Time Commando [Activision]
Viper [Ocean]
Werewolf: The Apocalypse [Capcom]
World Martial Arts Corp. [Bandai Multimedia]

OCTOBER 1996

BallBlazer [LucasArts]
Black Dawn [Virgin]
Command & Conquer [Virgin]
Cyber Gladiators [Sierra On-Line]
Deadly Skies [JVC]
Destruction Derby 2 [Psygnosis]
Dream Team Basketball [Eidos]
Grid Runner [Virgin]
Herc's Adventures [LucasArts]
Hyper 3-D Pinball [Virgin]
HyperBlade [Activision]
Incredible Hulk [Eidos]
Major Damage [Capcom]
MVP College Football '96 [Data East]
NBA Hang Time [GT Interactive]
NHL Open Ice [GT Interactive]
Oblivion [Eidos]
Onside Soccer II [American Technos]
Rebel Moon [GT Interactive]
Street Fighter Alpha 2 [Capcom]
Street Racer [UBI Soft]
Top Gun [Spectrum Holobyte]
WipeOut XL [Psygnosis]

4TH QUARTER 1996

2 Xtreme [Sony CEA]
Alien Striker [Atlus]
Andretti Racing '97 [Electronic Arts]
Area 51 [Williams]
Ark of Time [Koei]
Athanor [Psygnosis]
Batman Forever: The Arcade Game [Konami]
Battlestations [Electronic Arts]
Blast Chamber [Activision]
Broken Helix [Konami]
Burning Road [Playmates]
Castle of the Damned [Tecmo]
Contra: Legacy of War [Konami]
Crypt Killer [Konami]
Dark Forces [LucasArts]
Deathdrome [Viacom New Media]
Diamond630 [Amysoft]
Discworld II: Missing Presumed...!? [Psygnosis]
Disruptor [Universal Interactive]
Epidemic [Sony CEA]
Fade to Black [Electronic Arts]
Fatal Fury Real Bout [Sony CE]
Floating Runner [T*HQ]
Great Balls of Fire [Jerry Lee Lewis]
Hexen [GT Interactive]
Iron & Blood: Ravenloft [Acclaim]
Island of Dr. Moreau [Psygnosis]
Jack Nicklaus Golf [Accolade]
Jet Moto [Sony CEA]
K-1 Super Kick Boxer [T*HQ]
King's Field II [ASCII]
Legends Football '97 [Accolade]
Mega Man 8 [Capcom]
Mega Man X4 [Capcom]
Mickey Thompson Virt Moto X [Playmates]
Monster Rancher [Tecmo]
Monster Truck Rally [Psygnosis]
MTV's Aeon Flux [Viacom New Media]

playstation

new releases

* - *Working Title*

MTV's Slamscape [Viacom New Media]
NBA Jam Extreme [Acclaim]
NBA In The Zone 2 [Konami]
NCAA GameBreaker [Sony CEA]
Near Death [Atlus]
NFL Full Contact [Konami]
NFL GameDay '97 [Sony CEA]
NHL '97 [Electronic Arts]
NHL Face Off '97 [Sony CEA]
Pandemonium [Crystal Dynamics]
Peak Performance [Atlus]
Perfect Weapon [American Softworks]
PGA Tour '97 [Electronic Arts]
Power Piggs [Titus]
Project Overkill [Konami]
Rebel Assault II [LucasArts]
Reloaded [Interplay]
Revelations: Persona [Atlus]
Robotron X [Williams]
Samurai Shodown III: Blades of Blood [Sony CEA]
Shining Sword [American Laser Games]
Sign of Sun [Koei]
Soul Edge [Namco]
Spawn [Sony CEA]
Speed King [Konami]
Spot Goes to Hollywood [Virgin]
Star Control III [Accolade]
Star Gladiator [Capcom]
Suikoden [Konami]
Tecmo Thoroughbred Derby [Tecmo]
The City of Lost Children [Psygnosis]
The Divide: Enemies WIthin [Viacom New Media]
The King of Fighters '95 [Sony CEA]
Tobal No. 1 [Sony CEA]
Tomb Raider [Eidos]
Tunnel B-1 [Sony CEA]
Twisted Metal 2: World Tour [Sony CEA]
War Gods [Williams]
WWF: In Your House [Acclaim]

ANNOUNCED TITLES

Air Combat 2 [Namco]*
Aliens vs. Predator [FOX Interactive]
Breath of Fire III [Capcom]
Castlevania: The Bloodletting [Konami]
Final Fantasy IV [Square]
Ghost in the Shell [T*HQ]
HardBall 6 [Accolade]
International Vegetable Mosh Pit [GarageWorks]
Legacy of Kain [Crystal Dynamics]
Kumite: The Fighter's Edge [Konami]
Mega Man Neo [Capcom]
Namco Museum Vol. 3 [Namco]
Pitball [Accolade]
Pitfall 3-D [Activision]
Quake [GT Interactive]
Raven Project [Mindscape]
Rayman II [UBI Soft]
Rune Master [Koei]
Scorcher [Scavenger]
Sentient [Psygnosis]
Soul Master [Koei]
Spider [BMG Interactive]
Surreal [American Softworks]
Tenka [Psygnosis]*
Test Drive: Off Road [Accolade]
Warhammer [Mindscape]
World Championship Wrestling [T*HQ]
Zero Divide 2 [ZOOM]
Zork: Nemesis [Activision]

RECENT RELEASES

Alone in the Dark II [T*HQ]
Amok [GT Interactive]
Buster Bros. Collection [Capcom]
Catfight [Atlantean Interactive]
Destruction Derby [Sega of America]
Die Hard Trilogy [FOX Interactive]
Golden Axe: The Duel [Sega of America]
Hyper 3-D Pinball [Virgin]
Impact Racing [JVC]
Johnny Bazookatone [Eidos]
Major Damage [Capcom]
Marvel Super Heroes [Capcom]
NHL Open Ice [GT Interactive]
Raw Pursuit [JVC]
Robo Pit [T*HQ]
Scorcher [GT Interactive]
Shockwave Assault [Electronic Arts]
Storm [American Softworks]
Topps MVP Baseball '96 [Data East]
Varuna's Forces [JVC]
Water World [Ocean]

SEPTEMBER 1996

4X4 Gears & Guts [American Softworks]
Arcade's Greatest Hits [Williams]
Bubsy 3-D [Accolade]
Darknet [American Softworks]
Dark Rift [Vic Tokai]
Dead or Alive [Tecmo]
Dragon Force [Working Designs]
FIFA Soccer '97 [EA Sports]
Fox Hunt [Capcom]
Heart of Darkness [Virgin]
Highway 2000 [Natsume]
Iron & Blood [Take 2]
Jewels of the Oracle [Sun Soft]
Lethal Enforcers 1&2 [Konami]
Madden NFL 97[Electronic Arts]
MVP College Football '96 [Data East]
NFL Legends Football '97 [Accolade]
PGA Tour '97 [Electronic Arts]
Powerslave [Playmates]
Sex, Blood & Wheat Bread [GarageWorks]
Space Hulk [Electronic Arts]
S.T.O.R.M. [American Softworks]
Tecmo Stackers [Tecmo]
Tecmo Super Bowl [Tecmo]
Werewolf: The Apocalypse [Capcom]

OCTOBER 1996

Area 51 [Williams]
Big Bass World Champ [HOT-B]
Blast Chamber [Activision]
Command & Conquer [Virgin]
Deadly Skies [JVC]
Doom [GT Interactive]
Dream Team Basketball [Eidos]
Grand Theft Auto [BMG Interactive]
Grid Runner [Virgin]
Heart of Darkness [Virgin]
Herc's Adventures [LucasArts]
Hyper 3-D Pinball [Virgin]
HyperBlade [Activision]
Incredible Hulk [Eidos]
Magic Knight Rayearth [Working Designs]
Marvel Super Heroes [Capcom]
Natsume Pinball [Natsume]
Oblivion [Eidos]
Street Racer [UBI Soft]

4TH QUARTER 1996

Area 51 [Williams]
Armed [Interplay]
Battlestations [Electronic Arts]
Broken Helix [Konami]
Bubsy 3D [Accolade]
Bug Too! [Sega of America]
Contra: Legacy of War [Konami]
Crypt Killer [Konami]
Daytona USA: Championship Circuit Edition [Sega of America]
Deathdrome [Viacom New Media]
Descent [Interplay]
Fighting Vipers [Sega of America]
Jack Nicklaus Golf [Accolade]
Legends Football '97 [Accolade]
Loaded [Interplay]
Manx TT: Super Bike [Sega of America]
Mega Man 8 [Capcom]
Mega Man X4 [Capcom]
MLBPA Bottom of the 9th [Konami]
Mr. Bones [Sega of America]
NFL '97 [Sega of America]
NFL Full Contact [Konami]
NHL '97 [Electronic Arts]
Policenauts [Konami]
Project Overkill [Konami]
P.T.O. 2 [Koei]
Shredfest [Electronic Arts]
Soviet Strike [Electronic Arts]
Spot Goes to Hollywood [Virgin]
Street Fighter Alpha 2 [Capcom]
Tempest 2000 [Interplay]
The Adventures of the Game Rabbi [Jerseth Inc.]
The Lost Vikings 2 [Interplay]
The Sacred Pools [Sega of America]
Three Dirty Dwarves [Sega of America]
Tomb Raider [Eidos Interactive]
Virtua Cop 2 [Sega of America]
Virtual On: Cyber Troopers [Sega of America]
Worldwide Soccer II [Sega of America]

ANNOUNCED TITLES

Castlevania: The Bloodletting [Konami]
Criticom 2 [Vic Tokai]
Hexen [GT Interactive]
Kumite: The Fighter's Edge [Konami]
Lunar: Director's Cut [Working Designs]
Rage of the Love Panda [SaitoVision]
Revelations: Devil Summoner [Atlus]
Sonic Blast [Sega of America]
Tetris Plus [Jaleco]
TNN Outdoors Bass Tournament '97 [American Softworks]
VR Basketball '96 [Interplay]

saturn

This list is compiled from various sources including company releases and retail store guides. As such, all titles and dates are subject to change. Have a great day. No, really, please do.

PLAY DIRTY!

- Thousands of evil orcs have landed in the big city—make sure they get a rude welcome!
- Choose a dwarf (Greg, Taconac or Corthag) and one of their trusty, weapons (baseball bat, bowling pin or shotgun).
- Blast, bludgeon or seven-ten split hordes of villians in the Bronx, then rescue four genius kids taken by a sinister general.
- Alternate between the dwarves on the fly to unleash special moves or combine them for fast attacks in "brawl mode" or "morph dwarf."
- Three Dirty Dwarves delivers non-stop head smashing action with a high-energy soundtrack and a look all its own!

Three Dirty Dwarves™ for Sega Saturn™ and Windows® 95

SEGA SATURN

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Appaloosa Interactive

SEGASOFT

"Loads of character, interesting enemies and a completely distinctive graphic style."
NEXT GENERATION ONLINE

"Looks gorgeous and plays extremely well... even the loading screen is cool."
GAME FAN

"Entirely worthwhile, challenging and constantly entertaining."
GAME INFORMER

1 TO 3 PLAYERS

TEEN
T
AGES 13+

Three Dirty DWARVES™

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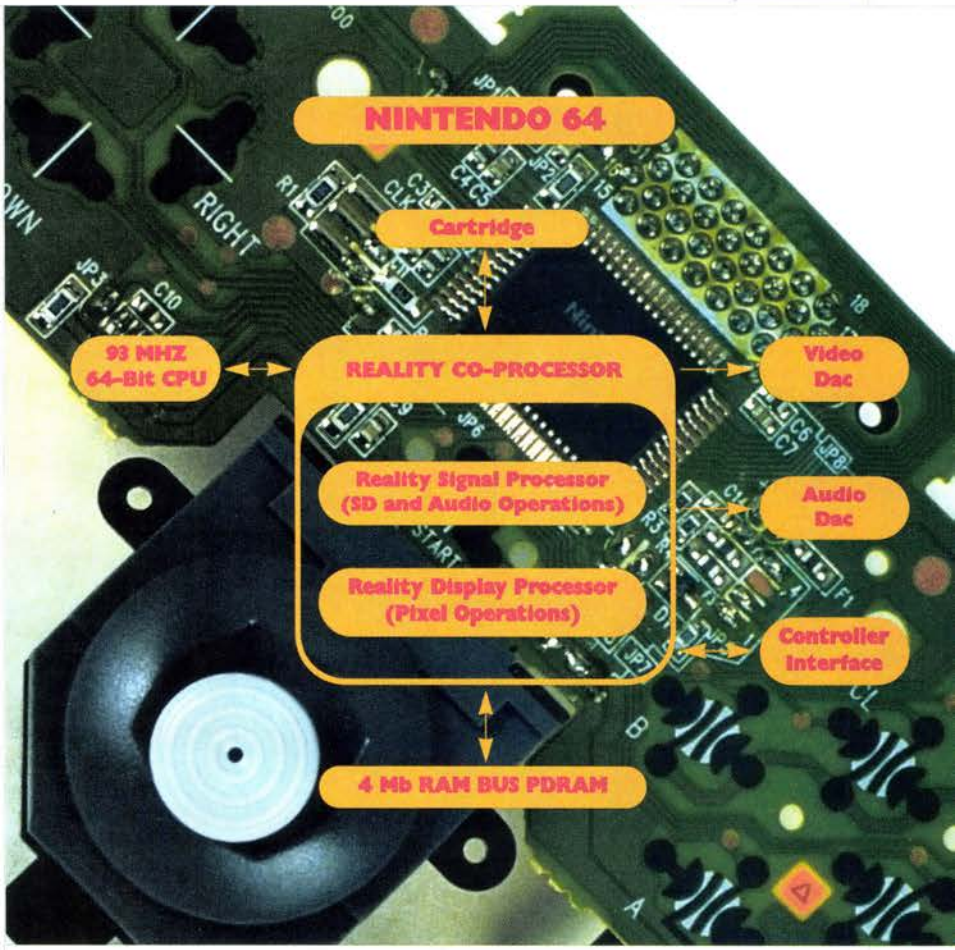
HIGHEST BIDDER IN THE BATTLE OF BITS for now

A Closer Look at the Technology Driving the Revolutionary N64

According to Hiroshi Yamauchi, the president of Nintendo Co. Ltd. (NCL), the most significant innovation in the Nintendo64 is its analog controller. The controller's analog thumb pad is certainly impressive, but the fact is that the controller is attached to a 64-Bit processor with a 93.75 Megahertz rating (nearly three times the speed of the processor in the Sony PlayStation) and a Silicon Graphics Reality Co-Processor that emulates the very expensive graphics processor in an Indigo workstation. In other words, this is a very impressive box; you might want to look at more than just its handle.

When trying to understand the logic behind the N64, the most important thing to remember is that it's built for speed. Nintendo selected the largest processor, the fastest memory and the quickest storage medium to make their console. Whether or not those components lead to the fastest gameplay remains to be seen. In the first crop of games for the N64, all of that speed is converted into amazing graphics.



"Nintendo's biggest problem will be keeping the cost of manufacturing cartridges down so that their games are competitively priced."

—Collin Gordon, Vice President, Product Development, Boss Games

The Components:

One of the interesting divisions in the design of the N64 is the decision to make the Central Processing Unit (CPU) subordinate to the Reality Co-Processor. The designers of the N64 considered graphic quality a paramount concern, so they created their entire console around the graphics-producing Reality Co-Processor rather than the information-crunching CPU.

The N64's CPU contains an MIPS R4300i RISC (reduced instruction set computer) chip that runs at 93.8 MHz. Just as a measure of comparison, the R3000A chip in the CPU of the PlayStation has 33MHz rating and the dual Hitachi SH-2 chips in the Saturn have been clocked at 28.6 MHz.

Since the heart of the N64 is its graphics processor, a more telling test is the speed of the Reality Co-Processor (RCP). It has been clocked at 62.5 MHz. More importantly, the RCP has dual processors—the Reality Signal Processor for handling 3-D and Audio operations and the Reality Display Processor for handling pixel operations. (Nintendo is not the first company to divide up graphic processing responsibilities. The PlayStation has the GTE geometry engine and the GPU graphic processor, and the Saturn has the VDP1 [video display processor] for handling sprites and the VDP2 for generating backgrounds.)

The final internal component of the N64 is its memory. The Saturn, PlayStation and N64 have approximately the same amount of memory—4 Megabytes. Sony and Sega have segmented their memory and dedicated it to specific tasks. Nintendo has not released details about the allocation of memory in the N64, but they have publicized the kind of memory they are using.

The N64 uses Rambus RDRAM, an exceptionally fast memory technology that has been clocked at 250 MHz but achieves two

"If there's a race to see which system has the most games, we're going to lose. We want the best quality games, not the most."

—Howard Lincoln, Chief Executive Officer, Nintendo of America

reads or writes per clock cycle. In other words, while Nintendo's claim that RDRAM runs at 500 MHz isn't entirely accurate, it does transfer information at that speed. In less technical terms, RDRAM can move 500 Megabytes of information in one second.

One external feature also plays a large role in defining the Nintendo^{64}—it uses cartridges instead of CD-ROM.

While Sega and Sony publish their games on CD-ROM, Nintendo continues to use cartridges. The strength of cartridges is that they offer a fast transfer rate. The problem with cartridges is that they are extremely expensive to manufacture and the only way to keep the manufacturing costs reasonable is to limit their storage capacity. As Collin Gordon, the vice president of product development at Boss Games, puts it, "Nintendo's biggest problem will be keeping the cost of manufacturing cartridges down so that their games are competitively priced."

The best way to see the difference between cartridge and CD-ROM is to compare two relatively similar games—Mario 64 and Resident Evil.

Both Resident Evil and Mario 64 are single-player games in which a hero explores an enormous house. Thanks to some new techniques, Nintendo has been able to harvest every ounce of storage on the Mario 64 cartridge. Many people doubted that Mario 64 would fit on a 96 Megabit cartridge, but through careful management, Nintendo has squeezed the game onto a 64 Megabit cartridge, dramatically cutting manufacturing costs.

By comparison, Resident Evil comes on a CD that is capable of holding up to 640 Megabytes of information. It doesn't matter whether the game filled 1 Megabyte or 639 Megabytes of storage, the manufacturing costs remain unchanged. Capcom, maker of Resident Evil, had enough room to included such storage-consuming features as a video introduction at the beginning of the game and digitized speech from start to finish.

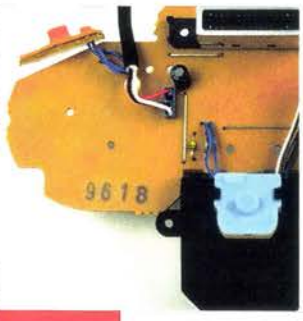
Because of space constraints, Mario^{64} has very little digitized speech. Mario says things like, "Here we go!" and "mama mia;" but for the most part, communication in Mario^{64} is limited to text windows.

In an effort to save storage space, Nintendo cheated intelligently in the creation of objects as well. Though the trees, blocks, and other objects in Mario 64 are three-dimensional, they have no front or back. No matter what angle you see them from, they look the same.

The Mario^{64} cartridge even has its own library of textures. This is a very economical way of creating hundreds of unique 3-D objects while carefully managing storage space.

The decision to use cartridges also gave the N^{64} some distinct advantages. When Mario opens doors, the game allows him to move seamlessly into his next world. There are no loading times. Cartridge ROM has practically no seek time.

In Resident Evil, you have to wait every time you enter a room so that the PlayStation can locate information on the CD and load it into its memory. Capcom has attempted to disguise this lag time by showing animations of doors opening; but in a game in which you go through dozens of doors hundreds of times, these delays are maddening.



CARTRIDGE vs. CD

As demonstrated by Super Mario^{64} and Resident Evil

Cartridges have practically no seek-time when changing scenes/worlds

•

Generally hold between 8 and 96 Megabits of information, limiting amounts of digitized speech and FMVs

•

Cost more to manufacture, resulting in higher cost to gamers

CDs have to locate data on the disc while the player experiences a "Loading Screen"

•

Holds 640 Megabytes of information allowing plenty of room for long FMVs and digitized speech

•

Cost less to manufacture, resulting in cheaper cost to gamers

The Games:

The final measure of any game system is in the games. Nintendo is promising that 12 to 18 games will be available for the N^{64} by the end of the year. Though three games should be available at launch, to date, only Mario^{64} and PilotWings 64 have been announced. The third game will likely be Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire, the third game Nintendo showed at the CBS Toy Test in Seattle.

According to Howard Lincoln, the CEO of Nintendo of America, only a few top game companies will be allowed to make games for the N^{64}. "If there's a race to see which system has the most games, we're going to lose. We want the best quality games, not the most."

Everybody agrees that Mario^{64} is a revolutionary game. Nintendo's next test will be proving that other N^{64} titles are equally fun. The problem is that many of the third parties creating games for the N^{64} are either new to video games or have a questionable reputation within the industry.

MY TRIP TO SEATTLE

BY CRASH BANDICOOT™

1. HERE'S ME DRIVING.

4. HERE'S ME SHOWING OFF MY GAME'S REAL-TIME 3-D WORLD WITH ITS LUSH, ORGANIC ENVIRONMENTS, TONS OF OBSTACLES, SECRET PATHWAYS AND BONUS LEVELS. OUTSIDE OF NINTENDO® HEADQUARTERS.

5. HERE'S ME BEING ESCORTED OFF THE PREMISES. BY SECURITY

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KIDS TO ADULTS K-A CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

2. HERE'S ME AT THE SPACE NEEDLE.

3. HERE'S ME WITH SOME OF THE GALS AT SEATTLE SLIM'S.

MY GAME →

CRASH BANDICOOT

Crash Bandicoot PlayStation

Sony's long-awaited entry into the platform game arena. You've never experienced anything quite as sensational as this fully animated cartoon world coming to life. It's flooded with obstacles, enormous levels, unbelievable graphics, detailed real-time lighting, amazing music and sound effects. Packed full of solid gameplay, hidden bonus levels, secret pathways and fiendish traps, this is the "must-have" game of the year. Travel in real time across 3D worlds in over 30 levels of intriguing gameplay with thousands of frames of animation! Interact with hilarious, fully rendered 3D cartoon-animated characters. It's packed with all the clas-

MY LOGOS ↓

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Madden NFL '97

After a few years off, Madden and the boys are back in town

Publisher: Electronic Arts
Platform: PlayStation
Format: Single CD-ROM
Developer: Tiburon
Release: September

For the first time, Pat Summerall and James Brown accompany John Madden in the full-motion video sequences that are speckled throughout season play.

For sports gamers, it was a horrible wait. To industry pundits, it was a shocking disaster. Either way, it wasn't pretty.

One of Electronic Arts' most harrowing and embarrassing moments occurred in October of 1995 when they failed to ship what would have certainly been one of, if not the two biggest software releases of the year—Madden NFL '96 for the Sony PlayStation and Sega Saturn.

Further pouring salt in the fresh, gaping wound was an opportunistic Sony, who quickly released the immensely successful NFL GameDay, which to this date is ranked number two on the all-time sales charts of PlayStation software. Even worse, this is the same company that Electronic Arts had unfailingly pledged their support to only a few scant months earlier during E³.

After being knocked down by this devastating one-two punch, EA Sports, like all good boxers, sprung from the mat, cleared the cobwebs and regained their composure. A major reshuffling of the EA Sports staff ensued quickly after the proclamation that the products were cancelled, including a quick shift from the previous developer, Visual Concepts to Tiburon, who brought us the games being reviewed today. The entire '96 game concept was immediately scrapped, which included ambitious plans to present Madden football as a pseudo-FOX Sports broadcast. A new Madden production team was put into place, with their gameplan emphasizing Madden basics, with afterthoughts given to the glitz and FMV that doomed the '96 version. Within nine months, the PlayStation and Saturn versions were simultaneously fleshed out in less than nine months.

Now that the two-year wait is over, an incredible amount of pressure is on Electronic Arts and EA Sports...

Now that the two-year wait is over, an incredible amount of pressure is on Electronic Arts and EA Sports to prove that they can reclaim their lost crown by re-establishing Madden football as the dominant and innovating force in sports gaming that it undoubtedly used to be.

From a die-hard sports fan's perspective, the long wait for Madden has paid off in most

McKnight on Madden

Matt McKnight is the assistant producer of Madden NFL '97, and was given the important task of helping bring the series back from the ashes.

IG: Artificial Intelligence is one of the things that is often neglected in sports games, was any special attention given to Madden?

MM: Because the Madden engine is entirely different than before, the AI was almost completely rewritten. Because of the new angles and other features, a lot of extra tweaking was done to make the game work. The computer plays smarter zone defenses and its play selection is very much improved. It is something we will continue to work on for '98.

IG: Regardless of whether a player is a 300-pound offensive lineman or a 170-pound wide receiver, the characters still look the same. Given the limitations of a CD-ROM machine, is there anyway to get around this?

MM: Yes, actually that is something we are actively working on for Madden '98 by stretching and widening characters.

IG: An enormous amount of footage was taken to produce the television broadcast concept of Madden '96. How much of it was used in '97?

MM: A lot of the footage regarding Madden discussing teams' strengths and weaknesses was left out, as was Leslie Visser who reported the injuries (the FOX broadcaster). We absolutely maxxed out the CD-ROM's capacity on Madden and had to leave a lot of things out.

IG: Although three members of the FOX broadcast are present throughout the game, the catchy FOX music and any sign of FOX Sports involvement is gone.

MM: It was a conscious decision on our part because FOX now has a development house (FOX Interactive), and there is a good chance that they might make their own line of sports games. We don't want to advertise for them in our game.

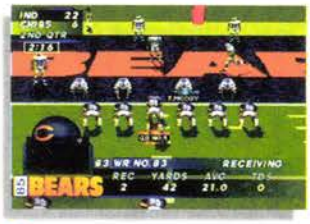
respects. First, and foremost, this title feels like a Madden game—and that's always a good start. The rock-solid gameplay that characterized the most popular series of football games definitely makes its presence known. Punctuated with a quick play selection interface, easy-to-learn passing and crisp control, Madden blends intuitive play mechanics with the right amount of gridiron realism to make this game not only an easy game to pick up, but a reasonably accurate simulation of America's most popular sport.

The game should be easily recognizable once the teams hit the field. A standard camera angle with an overhead perspective is situated right behind the offensive team. Unlike other Madden games in the past, and like many of the new 32-Bit sports games, Madden NFL '97 features several optional camera views. These range from the "Classic Madden Cam" to several varieties of a "Sideline Cam." Having the numerous camera views is a welcome, but superfluous feature, as there are only a few practical ones to play the game with.

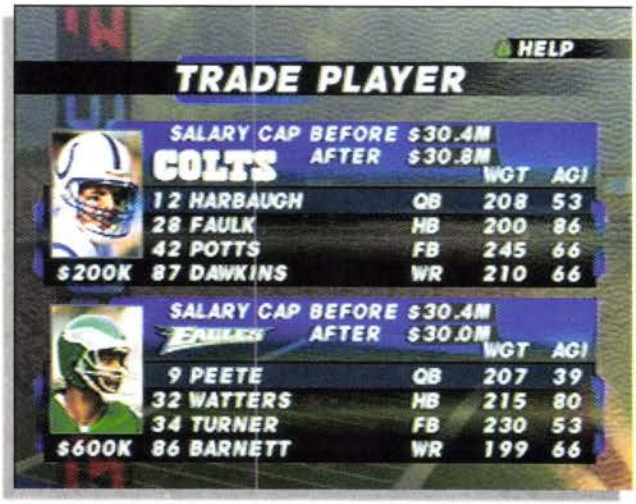
Graphically, Madden '97 follows the "Virtual Stadium" scheme that previous EA Sports titles have employed. Each rendered stadium strongly resembles the real thing, but within this 3-D playfield lies the football players who are comprised of 2-D sprites. This technique didn't work very well in NBA Live, often making the players appear out of their element. Fortunately, Madden does not have this problem, as everything seems to blend together rather well.

Probably responsible for this success is the excellent job performed on the process of motion capturing the player's appearances and animation. Although they aren't 3-D objects, they still give the slight impression that they are. Several additional motion-captured end-zone dances are also spooled from the CD-ROM this is a sports game.

First and foremost, this title feels like a Madden game—and that's always a good start.



During gameplay, an array of statistics are periodically flashed on the lower portion of the play screen. These consist of individual stats to QB passing charts.



Madden NFL '97's trade and create-a-player options are unmatched by any other console game. Adding even more depth to these features is the ability to work within the salary cap, which is an all-too-important facet of the NFL.

Madden NFL '97 for Saturn

Unlike many other games which are ported across multiplatform games, Saturn owners can rest assured that their version of Madden NFL '97 is nearly identical to the outstanding PlayStation version.

Most of the differences really aren't very important, and exist only in superfluous parts of the game. The spectacular full-motion-video sequences on the Saturn are much more grainy, have far fewer colors, and are cropped to take up less of the screen than the crystal-clear PlayStation counterpart. The reason for this is that the PlayStation incorporates much better compression routines than the Saturn, making this disparity a normal occurrence between ports of the same game. This FMV quality loss affects the excellent opening introduction in addition to the video played before each season game that contains the likes of television commentators John Madden, James Brown and Pat Summerall.

If this were an interactive movie, or something of the like, there might be reason for alarm, but for crying out loud,

Saturn owners can rest assured that their version of Madden is nearly identical to the outstanding PS version.

The only other difference in the Saturn version is that unimpressive menu and statistical screens on the PlayStation look even worse due to the fact that PlayStation cannot do transparencies as aptly as the Sony hardware can.

In other words, Electronic Arts' Saturn Madden NFL '97 is just as great a game as its PlayStation counterpart, and is easily the best football title to hit the Saturn thus far.

Multiple camera angles are an eye-pleasing part of the game like the sideways view (top). But once the novelty wears off, the classic Madden views (above) are the most practical to play with.

GRAPHICS: B
+ An excellent blend of 2-D and 3-D graphics.
- The menu and statistical screens are a even less eye pleasing than the PS

SOUNDS: B
+/- Credible stadium atmosphere, and adequate sounds. It's too bad they don't have that snazzy FOX Sports music.

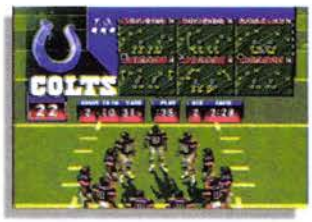
GAMEPLAY: A
+ By far the most entertaining football game out there.
- Even with better AI, the computer is still pretty easy to beat.

LASTING POWER: A
+ In two-player mode, this game has limitless replayability.
+ Many options and historical teams add extra life to the title.

OVERALL B+

RECOMMENDED

AI has always been neglected when it comes to Madden games and to at least a certain extent, it has finally been improved.



The play selection screen (top) is average, but could have used a little more pizazz. The team selection screen (above) automatically computes team strengths even after players have been traded.

Da '85 Bears versus da Colts. Since da '85 Bears are losing in dis shot, Ditka must have taken a day off during dis game or dey would be winning 252 to 3. Pass me another sausage, will ya?

after a touchdown.

AI has always been neglected when it comes to Madden games, and to at least a certain extent, it has finally been improved. For the first time, there is a selectable skill level, and at the hardest setting, "All-Madden," the computer is reasonably adept at finding an open receiver and calling responsible plays. The defense has also been given a few more brain cells, as the computer covers zones more intelligently, calls better defensive plays and blows less assignments. Unfortunately, it seems to have trouble when it attempts to calculate the correct angle for tackling players, allowing for too many short passes and outside runs to break loose for big plays.

To further complement the gameplay, Madden offers an array of options such as the welcome ability to create a player, and alter his statistics as seen fit. This is particularly useful to update rosters, add free-agents and rookies. The only problem is that these options are only available in the season mode of the game, which makes experimenting with trades and created players more time-consuming. On the other hand, the season mode allows for the created players and trades to be saved to a memory card, along with individual and season statistics among other information.

For those interested in the managerial aspect of football, a host of front-office features are available. During season play, players can be traded between any team, and there is even an option to impose a salary cap that will restrict you from executing outrageously one-sided swaps, such as trading Emmitt Smith for Desmond Howard.

The only aesthetic lapse in the game is a relatively minor one. Although the full-motion video is fantastic, the in-game menus and selection screens are a little sub-par and uninspired. In the grand scheme of things, they aren't entirely important, but they are easy to correct.

Madden NFL '97 is certainly not an ambitious breakthrough sports game, but frankly, it doesn't matter. EA Sports has delivered the best console football game to date, returning to their former sporting brilliance.

ig

Tale of Two Maddens

Madden has, by far, brought more innovations to the genre of sports gaming than any other series of titles on the market. The two most innovative entries of the series were made by the original 16-Bit cartridge in 1990 and the forgotten 1994 3DO version of the football game.

Many people don't remember that Electronic Arts did bring out a 32-Bit football game long ago. Of course, that forgotten project appeared on the 3DO Multiplayer in 1994.

Originally planned as a premier launch title for the doomed video game system, the much-anticipated Madden was delayed past the Christmas season, hurting Panasonic chances for strong holiday hardware sales.

John Madden Football, as it was called, was unparalleled at the time, with graphics that could match up well with any of the current 32-Bit football offerings on the market right now.

The most curious "feature" in Madden Football for the 3DO is that its brains were entirely transplanted from the '93 Genesis version which was made more than a year before it.

Because EA Sports did not want to funnel a massive amount of resources to a project that stood little chance of selling large numbers, development time and money was saved by only slightly tweaking what was taken from the Genesis.

Quite a bit has changed in the last few years. The 3DO version of Madden (top) still borrowed heavily from the first Genesis version ever made. (above)

GRAPHICS: B+
+ An excellent blend of 2-D and 3-D graphics.
- The menu and statistical screens are a bit uninspired.

SOUNDS: B
+/- Credible stadium atmosphere, and adequate sounds. Its too bad they don't have that snazzy FOX Sports music.

GAMEPLAY: A
+ By far the most entertaining football game out there.
- Even with better AI, the computer is still pretty easy to beat.

LASTING POWER: A
+ In two-player mode, this game has limitless replayability.
+ Large selection of options and historical teams add extra life.

OVERALL A–

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

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They kidnapped your partner.

They stole your spaceship.

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One of the first-ever announced titles for the Nintendo64, Turok: Dinosaur Hunter is a step up from the average Doom clone with fully 3-D polygonal enemies and graphics that blow Doom's away.

Turok: Dinosaur Hunter

Travel forward in time to do battle with Jurassic evil in Acclaim's first Nintendo64 title

Publisher: Acclaim
Platform: Nintendo64
Format: 64 Megabit Cartridge
Developer: Iguana
Release: November

With the help of Nichimen Graphics, Acclaim has created some beautiful radiating explosions for some of their more intense weapons.

When Acclaim first announced that they were developing for the Nintendo64, gamers were skeptical at best. Would it be one of Acclaim's licensed titles, like Alien Trilogy, Batman Returns or perhaps a licensed Marvel title? None of Acclaim's titles ended up making the jump. Instead, Acclaim opted to make an entirely new game for their Nintendo64 debut.

Turok: Dinosaur Hunter is the first fruit of Iguana and Acclaim's labor—a first-person 3-D action adventure title set in the Lost Land. Turok is a license from Valiant Comics, which was purchased by Acclaim some time ago. The original Turok adventures came out in the mid 1950s from Gold Key Comics, and will bare only a vague resemblance to Acclaim's new Turok series, which is set to be released on comic racks everywhere this December.

The game itself is a first-person "Doomesque" offering. Acclaim enlisted Nichimen Graphics Inc.'s N•World software to create the characters and effects present during gameplay. Acclaim's proprietary motion-capture technology aided designers in creating movements for the game's mechanoid dinosaurs and bosses.

Gamers assume the role of Turok, who sets out on a mission against The Campaigner, an evil overlord. He has set up an army of Bionosaurs, bionic dinosaurs, which are now roaming about the Lost Land doing his evil bidding. The Campaigner's scheme is to gain control of a device called the Chronosceptor, which—once in his grasp—will allow him to control time and take over the Lost Land for good. As the hero of the game, your job is to make sure he never gets his hands on the device, because only you know that it has an unknown flaw that if activated will destroy the entire universe.

Turok is divided into three chapters to create the effect of playing through a comic book. First The Plot Revealed, followed by The Ancient Ruins and finally, The Lost Land. The game has over nine regular levels, with secret areas and hidden levels. Dinosaurs, Bionosaurs, Robot Droids and other characters from the comic populate the levels, with different boss characters at the end of each chapter of action.

Gamers assume the role of Turok, who sets out on a mission against The Campaigner, an evil overlord.

Gamers will find themselves controlling Turok through a number of different terrains, which will necessitate running, climbing, swimming and blasting enemies along the way. The 3-D style provides gamers non-linear gameplay, and the game's unique interface places power-ups at critical times in the action. Gamers are free to look and fire in all directions using the N64's analog control stick.

Weapons that Turok can pick up along the way include a low-tech bow and arrow, a more futuristic tek bow, riot shotguns and grenade launchers. When fired, these weapons inflict severe damage on your enemies, and some create an excellent light show. The Nintendo64's capabilities are used to the fullest to display the graphically intense effects of various weapons.

Scheduled for a November release, Turok will be one of the Nintendo64's first third-party releases. If it plays as good as it looks, Acclaim will prove that they can make the jump from publishing good licensed games from other companies to producing good in-house titles as well. Game players will make the ultimate decision whether this is a second-rate Doom clone, or if it is able to hold its own against the most popular games in the genre.

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The weapon effects in Turok: Dinosaur Hunter make Quake look like Wolfenstein 3-D. Each weapon has amazing animation just on the weapon alone, and the special effects drawn from them look like they came from ID4.

The clock is running your adrenaline is pumping

sweat is dripping into your eyes as you

feel your muscles tensing and you prepare to

make the move that for just one fraction of a second will send you

soaring right over that other guy in your

quest to feel the exquisite rush of head

connecting with ball and in one brilliant blinding

flash wonder how anyone can actually

believe that this is just a game.

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We can only hope the actual game will look as good as these rendered scenes. The power of the Nintendo64 will redefine graphics quality in many genres of gaming including racing.

Top Gear Rally

Boss Game Studios introduces Top Gear Rally for the Nintendo64

Publisher: Kemco
Platform: Nintendo64
Format: Single 64mb cartridge
Developer: Boss Game Studios
Release: Summer '97

Newcomer Boss Game Studios is once again ready to set the world on fire, starting with the roads. Their third project, Top Gear Rally, has the potential to give players one of the most universally appealing racing experiences to date.

What is Boss' secret weapon? More customization options and variety than any racing game to date can claim. The first part of Top Gear Rally's draw comes from the ability to play in two modes, "arcade" and "season," letting players get as deep into the game's racing as they want. Arcade Mode will be just that—a quick, easy-to-pick-up racing game similar to Sega Rally, with the Season Mode taking the Arcade Mode's racing through multiple circuits. As players advance through the circuits, more vehicles will be available to select from, with 15 vehicles available by the time players reach the expert circuit, not including hidden ones. Each of the vehicles will have its own distinct handling traits. Both modes will allow players to customize their vehicles, buying suspension, tires, steering and other essential and not-so-essential details. In addition to customizing the machinery itself, Boss will include a small paint program that will allow players to draw their own decals and select from others provided by Boss, giving players complete control over the look of the car. Players will even be able to customize the sound of the horn.

Top Gear Rally will place players in a variety of racing locales. The locale will play an integral part in the game's play. Weather conditions will abound in the game's projected 15 tracks, with settings ranging from slippery ice-covered roads to dusty desert trails and steep hills. With such varied terrain types, customization will help ensure success. Top Gear Rally would not be so potentially impressive if it were not for the all-encompassing physics model. Brian Fehdrau, formerly of SquareSoft, and Waylan Wang, a simulations programmer, have concocted a physics model that takes everything into account, providing the game with real-time car flips, suspension and denting. While these may sound unimpressive at first, the norm for these is to animate them a la Destruction Derby and Daytona Racing. Once completed and fully implemented, the physics model alone is expected to require more processing power than that of a PlayStation.

Top Gear Rally will place racers in a variety of racing locales. The locale will play a vital role in the game's play.

As one of the first racing games for the Nintendo64, Top Gear will set the benchmark for quality.

Even with this processing requirement in place, Boss' engine will still have room for two-player racing in addition to four camera views, a rear-view mirror, and realtime 3-D graphics comparable to those of the SGI-rendered video demo, pictures from which adorn this page.

So what relation does Top Gear Rally have to Kemco's previous Top Gear games? Boss plans on incorporating all of the features that made previous Top Gear titles a success, starting with the aforementioned multiplayer options and the car customization. Top Gear Rally is shaping up to become one of the hottest racing games, especially given so little competition on the Nintendo64.

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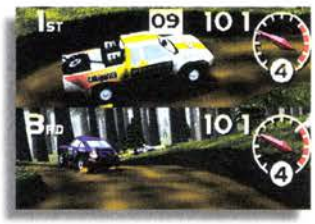
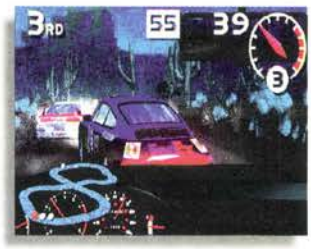
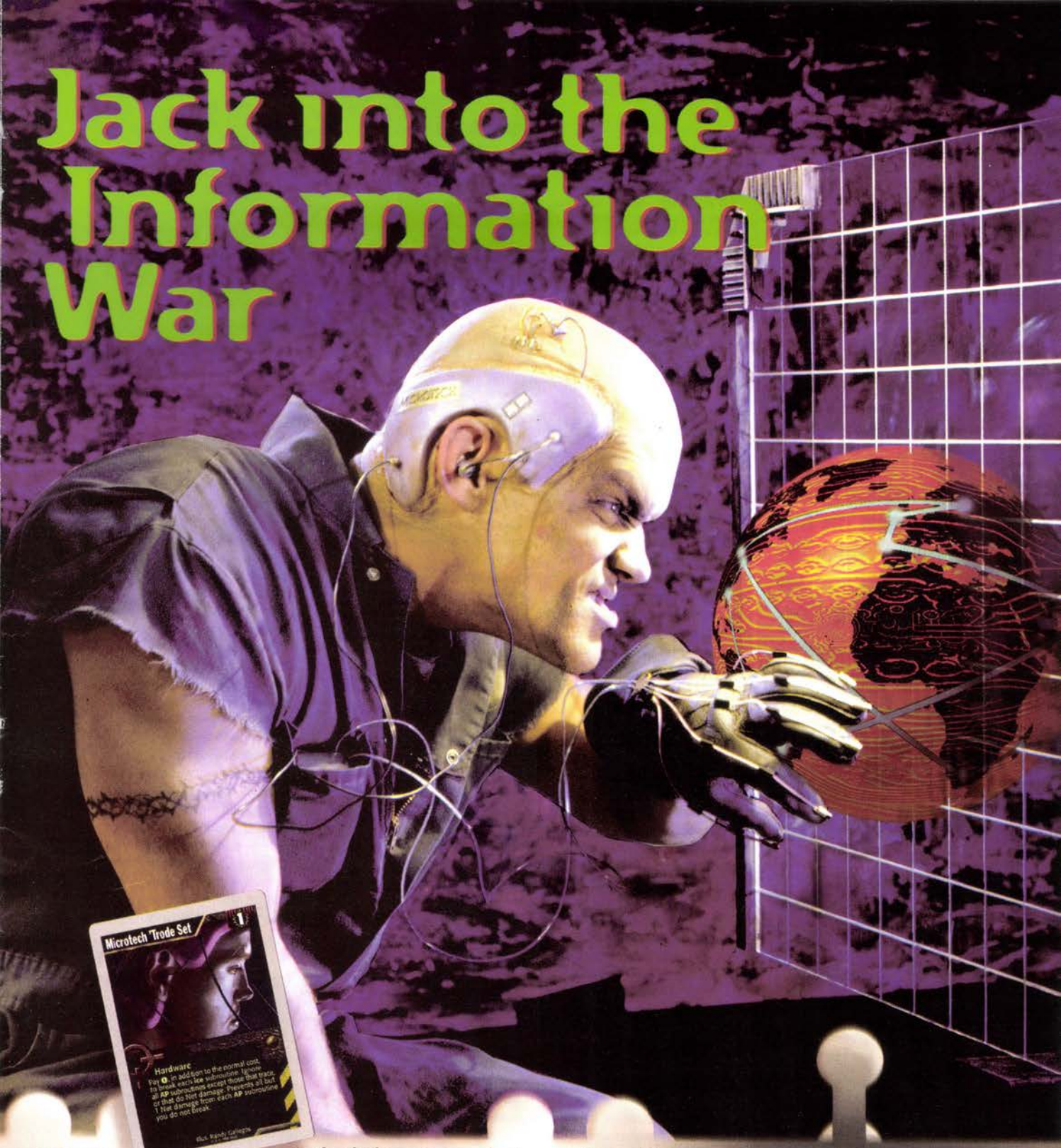


Differentiating itself from run-of-the-mill racing games, Top Gear Rally offers a ton of customizations to better handle the varying road courses.



The elements, be it snow, ice, mud, rain or simply darkness will be the third factor in the racing equation. Driving skill coupled with car preparation and setup will be the other deciding factors in a race.

Jack into the Information War



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As you can see, the enemies are no longer in their black-and-white "sailor outfits." Unfortunately for this player, this well-dressed, blue jeans-clad gunman is about to sink a few bullets into his skull.

Virtua Cop 2

Sega reloads and takes aim on the competition with the great sequel to Virtua Cop

Publisher: Sega of America
Platform: Sega Saturn
Format: Single CD-ROM
Developer: Sega's AM2
Release: December

Superbly realistic cityscapes and a broader variety of levels in addition to multiple pathways and new enemies propels Virtua Cop 2 far higher than its predecessor.

Last year, Sega's trio of Virtua Fighter 2, Sega Rally, and Virtua Cop gave gamers an idea of the Saturn's capabilities. The close conversions of three of Sega's most popular and technically impressive arcade games dramatically increased the Saturn's following, and made a huge difference in keeping Sega afloat in the console gaming market. Now, Sega's Saturn conversion of Virtua Cop 2 is aiming to once again impress the gaming world with a near-perfect arcade conversion of one of Sega's best arcade games. The sequel to Virtua Cop is very much the same type of game as the first game; based on simple point-and-shoot gameplay, it nonetheless manages to improve over its predecessor in every area.

The most drastic improvements over the first Virtua Cop are unquestionably aesthetic. One major difference is the use of higher-resolution textures, which, combined with MIP-mapping, makes Virtua Cop 2 look much sharper and more detailed than Virtua Cop did. Also immediately visible is the increased character detail. Enemies and hostages are rendered with much better use of texture-mapping than in the original, making them look much more realistic. Also greatly enhanced is the complexity of the various objects in the game: cars, motorcycles and helicopters are all over the early stages; jewelry lies inside glass cases in a store being robbed; bottles and other objects sit on tables and lounge chairs are scattered around a pool. The visual impression given by Virtua Cop 2 is very impressive, and leaves no doubts that Saturn software development has come a long way since Virtua Cop.

Differences in gameplay between VC and its sequel are fewer, and, is understandable given the success of the former. The fundamentals of the gameplay remain the same, with even the power-ups the same as in the first game. Additions to the game include extended car chases and many more hidden bonuses. It is possible to get power-ups or cause cataclysmic explosions by shooting in just the right places. Finally, although the game still only consists of three levels with three stages each, it is now possible to choose between two paths at the beginning of certain stages, in effect adding a significant amount of playtime to the game. Without a doubt, Sega created VC2 with an eye toward building minor enhancements on top of the original Virtua Cop engine, and while this means that those who found the original game boring will probably not find much to excite them in its sequel, fans of the original will get exactly what they've been waiting for.

Based on simple point-and-shoot gameplay, VC2 nonetheless manages to improve over its predecessor in every area.

Another aspect of Virtua Cop 2 which puts it ahead of its predecessor is its sheer attention to detail. Nearly every object which could conceivably react to being shot, does: dumpsters open, bottles shatter, computer terminals on desks bounce around as their screens shatter. Even better, some objects react differently depending on how exactly they're shot. Pool chairs will, upon first being shot, start to teeter then, if left alone, will steady themselves. However, if shot enough times in quick succession, they will become more unstable until they flip over. Little details like this are what really make the graphical and play details feel complete. With two levels finished, fans of Virtua Cop will again find themselves busy shooting at baddies while protecting unfortunate bystanders.

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Increased interaction with objects within the playfield is one of the more major improvements in Virtua Cop 2.

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Heroes of Might and Magic II brings completely new elements to one of the best strategy games of 1995; the first of which is a multi-part, split level campaign. Each scenario in the campaign brings you closer to your goal in this epic struggle of good versus evil. Additional features include two new hero archetypes, Wizard and Necromancer, upgraded multiplayer capabilities, and dozens of new monsters, artifacts and spells.

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Utilizing Sega's brand-new Model 3 arcade hardware, Virtua Fighter 3 brings forth a look and feel that is more realistic than any other fighting game (or general arcade game, for that matter) ever made.

Virtua Fighter 3

The AM2 team is nearly ready to once again revolutionize the arcade industry

Publisher: Sega of Japan
Platform: Arcade
Format: Model 3
Developer: Sega's AM2
Release: 4th Quarter '96

With visuals as amazing as these, it's no doubt that future Model 3 games will further revolutionize the arcade gaming scene. What's rumored to be next? Daytona 2.

Sega's AM2 department has just raised the standard for game graphic and gameplay excellence once again.

The much-anticipated Virtua Fighter 3 is finally nearing completion with the latest version standing at just over 70-percent complete.

For starters, the game has two new characters in addition to the original 10 characters from VF2. One of the new characters is Aoi Umenokouji, a Japanese girl who is trained in the martial arts of aikido—a style that utilizes the strength of the opponent for throws. Her costume consists of a kimono that flows from form to form during combat. Contrarily, the other new fighter, Taka Arashi, uses a more forceful style—sumo wrestling. He slowly moves around the stage in his scant attire to pummel opponents into submission. Because his style is Sumo, Taka is a hard character to knock off his feet.

The other fighters have gotten face-lifts in addition to makeovers in new or "refurbished" costumes. An example of this is Shun Di's costume. His one-player costume is basically the same, but his two-player costume is rather strange. It vaguely resembles a hiking outfit complete with knee-high shorts, a green toque and a little backpack.

Other changes in the characters are the addition of new moves that tend to show off the characters' style even more than they did before. For example, many of Wolf's new moves are powerful throw moves, while Sarah has many new nimble kicks to add to her potent arsenal of moves.

The gameplay control has also undergone changes. Most notably is the addition of a new "escape" button. It has several functions that have not been completely revealed at this time. One of the things it does do is allow the player to side-step attacks, allowing a player to dodge an attack or to attack an opponent's unprotected flank. Also, while executing the side-step action, it is possible to tap in your next set of attacks that happen as soon as the side-step motion stops. The escape button is also used to dash about instead of having to double tap the joystick to run back and forth faster.

Planned for a home release sometime in 1997, VF3 will tax the Saturn's power beyond its limits.

The much-anticipated Virtua Fighter 3 is finally nearing completion with the latest version standing at just over 70-percent complete.

An interesting thing to note is that the new button is not essential. Yu Suzuki, the creator of the series, stated that the escape button functions can be done by a combination of already-existing buttons and joystick movements. The reason behind this is to make VF3 appeal to a wider breadth of players who do not wish to take the time to learn all of the joystick combinations that the escape button eliminates.

Virtua Fighter 3 introduces two new characters: Aoi Umenokouji and shown here, Taka Arashi.

Other changes involve the interactive stages themselves, which each possess specific attributes that will make it a completely different fighting environment. For example, the desert stage's sandy ground will slow the fighters' movements slightly. In this stage, there are also no longer any "ring-outs," adding a welcome taste of gameplay diversity. Other new stages change game strategy dramatically by implementing slopes or stairs.

With the combination of revolutionary graphics and the outstanding additions to gameplay, Virtua Fighter enthusiasts and novice users alike will find enough new features to keep them satisfied for a long time. Perhaps even more interesting than the game itself will be watching Sega attempt a Saturn conversion. Until then, we can all drool over arcade VF3. ig

THE CRITICS CAN'T ESCAPE THE SPELL...

"IT MAKES MYST LOOK LIKE A WORD JUMBLE."
NEWSWEEK

"ZORK NEMESIS IS A BRILLIANT EXAMPLE OF WHAT AN ADVENTURE GAME SHOULD BE."
PC ENTERTAINMENT/GAMES

"I CAN'T OVEREMPHASIZE HOW SPECTACULAR ZORK NEMESIS LOOKS."
CD-ROM TODAY

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

"ALTHOUGH IT'S SURE TO RECEIVE PLENTY OF COMPARISON TO MYST, IT'S IN A CLASS ALL ITS OWN."
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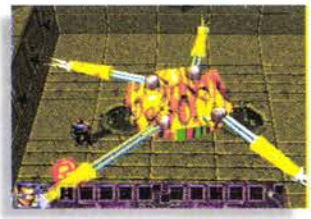
If you've ever wondered what it would be like to walk along a nature trail while being attacked by big robot cranes and large, metallic robot guns, then this is your game.

Contra: Legacy of War

Just because it says Contra on the box doesn't necessarily mean it plays like it

Publisher: Konami
Platform: PlayStation
Format: Single CD-ROM
Developer: Appalooza
Release: November



At press time, this unfinished version of Contra: Legacy of War already possessed some impressive 3-D graphics. Shown above is one of the bosses.

Making an updated version of a long line of classic, popular games always presents a tough question to the producers creating the next offspring of that game: Should they cater the game's graphics and play style to match the spirit of the old games, thus pleasing the players that made those titles so popular, or should the company incorporate certain elements of the title within an entirely new game concept that takes advantage of its platform in an effort to perhaps appeal to a wider audience? There really is no right or wrong answer, but to particular game player's tastes, there probably is.

Konami clearly chose to radically deviate from older Contra titles with Legacy of War. The basic concept vaguely keeps some of the elements present in past Contra titles, but serves as a thin veil to mask the entirely different game underneath. The overall result is a fast-paced action game that has some nice 3-D graphics, but barely resembles Contra games that have graced arcades and home systems alike.

Legacy of War centers around freedom fighters (you can now select between a man, a robot, a girl and an alien) particularly adept at blasting aliens with the help of upgraded weaponry found by picking up various flying symbols. Contra players will recognize many things such as the familiar, wall-like bases adorned by huge guns and punctuated with a glowing red "eye" that is always its weakness, and the target of your weapons' blasts. All of these small similarities are cute, but make the game truly Contraesque they do not.

Aside from the trivial and historical comparisons, what Konami is producing is a high-intensity, simple shoot-'em-up that takes place in isometric, 3-D playfields. As you fight your way through each course, aliens and their vehicles are apt to attack you from all directions, including from above. The path you take is controlled, not allowing for much freedom, and in some instances you are forced to stay in one area until you destroy certain enemies. These hazards are comprised of mid- and end-level "bosses" that take the form of souped-up tanks or flying saucers with large spotlights.

The overall result is a fast-paced action game that has some nice 3-D graphics, but barely resembles Contra.

At press time, three levels of the game have been completed, although they still are being tweaked and perfected. Presently, these stages range from forest levels to a sprawling, mechanical city. A variety of weapons are available which can be picked and powered up via acquiring items dispersed throughout the playfield. Weapons consist of guided lasers, flamethrowers, bombs and several types of whiz-bang machine guns.

It's basically rush hour in this part of town, with a bulk of the traffic caused by enemies tropper overhead. It's unfortunate that farther down the road is a huge tank.

One of the most quirky features of the game is a PlayStation-specific 3-D Mode which will only work with special glasses included with the game. If that doesn't give you nostalgic vibes, there aren't many things that will. More useful options include the ability to save your game after each level, and the always-welcome two-player cooperative play.

Having made these points, nostalgic gamers will probably be disappointed in this title if the Contra name and gameplay comprise the key reasons for purchasing this title. Contrarily, those without preconceived notions and expectations might well be satisfied as Konami stands to make at least an above-average action title depending on how well they complete the game.

Gorgeous landscapes and numerous uniquely detailed characters promise to give Capcom's latest RPG a leg up on much of its competition.

Breath of Fire III

An early look reveals that Capcom's third breath appears to be a charm

Publisher: Capcom
Platform: PlayStation
Format: Single CD-ROM
Developer: Capcom
Release: 2nd Quarter '97

Despite a respectable following in Japan, the first two editions of the Breath of Fire series have suffered in the transition stateside. Thankfully, it appears Capcom has learned from these mistakes and has taken more interest in the U.S. market for the Playstation version of Breath of Fire III, evidenced by the very fact that they have already provided members of the U.S. press with a 10 percent version of the title.

Their interest may have merit—Breath of Fire III looks to be making the jump into the 32-Bit generation impressively. The first two Breath of Fire games can stand on their own as good RPGs, but neither introduced anything that hadn't been done many times before. Likewise, most of Breath of Fire III should be familiar to fans of the first two games or players of RPG games in general. The graphic style of the characters is very similar to the earlier two games, including all the half-man, half-animal races that have been a BoF trademark. Players traverse a smaller scale world map, until reaching certain points that can be entered such as towns, dungeons and forests. Like the previous two BoFs, combat takes place at random, so you don't see your enemy until you are fighting them. Combat is turn-based with standard options—run, fight, spell, item, etc. Nothing too original, but standard play options that have proven themselves to work over the years.

Breath of Fire's expert mix of 3-D environments and 2-D characters is clearly evident.

At this early stage of development, graphics are what set Breath of Fire III apart. By using texture-mapped polygons for the backgrounds and sprites for all the characters, Capcom exploits the advantages of both 2-D and 3-D at the same time. The hand-drawn characters have the subtle range of emotion and detail that polygons still cannot provide. The fully 3-D backgrounds give an immersive and more realistic feel to the whole world and yet maintain the graphic quality of more traditional RPGs.

Capcom exploits the advantages of both 2-D and 3-D at the same time.

Furthermore, nothing in the game really looks like it was made with polygons—from congested towns to the hilly wilderness, everything looks natural with little of the blockiness associated with polygons. Everything moves smoothly while the changing perspectives and camera angles add visual spice to an already impressive-looking game. Although it was possible in the early version we received to manipulate the camera during combat, it is unclear at this point how camera movement will be ultimately handled.

Because the version we received is so early in development, any of BoF is subject to change.

With any luck, some of the originality and eye to detail that went into the graphics will be applied to combat and gameplay as development progresses. But even now, Breath of Fire III looks to have at least enough incredible visuals and potential gameplay to make an impact on the RPG market.

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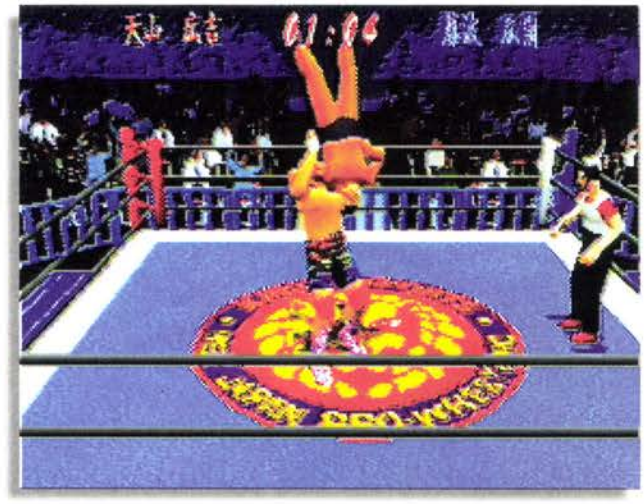


Whether or not this is some sort of interesting upside-down kiss or a devastating, back-breaking move is not important. What is important is that it looks pretty good on the television screen.

Toukon Retsuden

Japan's most popular 32-Bit wrestling game prepares to slam into U.S. markets

Publisher: Activision

Platform: Playstation

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Tomy

Release: November (U.S.)

Notice the attention to detail within the game, such as the polygonal referee that is watching the carnage take place before his eyes.

Some of the best games are those that never leave the shores of Japan. Despite selling through to the gaming masses of Japan, many game developers lack the contacts, know-how or business sense to get their game distributed on a global basis. Many companies have begun to actively pursue the distribution rights of these hidden treasures. Activision has made their willingness and savvy known by acquiring the rights to Toukon Retsuden, one of the most popular 32-Bit PlayStation games in the Japanese market.

Toukon Retsuden, whose name will be changed to "Power Pro Wrestling" when it hits many countries' shores (including the U.S.), is a wonderfully conceived, fully 3-D wrestling game. The game sparkles in technical achievements, powered by an exceptional, fast-moving polygonal engine which moves the characters effortlessly and fluently.

The battle in the ring is fought by 12 different 3-D polygonal wrestlers, each of whom has his own distinctive attributes and special moves. Although this game does not share the excessive brashness of U.S. wrestling leagues such as the WWF, it does indeed have character. For example, one wrestler wears a mask that makes him look like a robot from a Japanese anime cartoon, while another one is a huge, barbaric bruiser who prefers to kick his opponents to the ground. All of these characters are subject to change, however, as Activision is closely working with Tomy to give the game a more "international flavor."

Dirty tricks and unfair play are always a large part of wrestling. Shown above are some of the more brutal moves, such as choke holds and a skirmish that will please the ringside ticket holders.

Many of the wrestlers' appearances will be changed, with an emphasis probably placed on which country each one originates.

Gameplay is where Toukon Retsuden excels. Many different interesting matches can be

The game sparkles in technical achievements, powered by an exceptional, fast-moving polygonal engine.

waged, as each character has a variety of moves which are executed through combinations of button presses. For example, one button is pressed to place an opponent into a grapple, while a combination of others designates what will be done with him while he is rendered helpless in his keeper's hold. Moves such as pile drivers, hammers, body slams and the all-powerful thumb breakers are all part of the basic combat repertoire, and thanks to a little motion-capture, they all look stunningly realistic. The whole gambit of things that make wrestling what it is are all in this title—moves such as bouncing your opponent from the ropes, thereby launching him into your hurtful charge are all part of the game, as is hair-pulling, head noogies and chokes. Best of all, the really dirty necessities are all included such as throwing your opponent out of the ring, and the always effective tactic of slamming your opponent's head into ringside objects.

Retsuden has a variety of modes that allow for several types of gameplay. The one-player mode rotates fights much like Street Fighter—disposing of one wrestler, then moving to another in addition to a highly customizable two-player mode. In each mode, several variables can be altered such as match length and pin-down time among other things. Simply put, this game will play the way you want it to.

Assuming that Activision doesn't try to fix anything that isn't broken, "Power Pro Wrestling" (as it will be called in the U.S.) has the potential to be the best wrestling game for the PlayStation, and that shouldn't be belittled by the fact that the platform hasn't really been the home of very many games.

ig

Quarterback Club's graphics look good enough until after the snap when they begin to animate—very slowly.

Quarterback Club '97

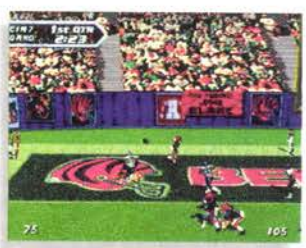
Acclaim attempts to improve on a lackluster Saturn debut

Publisher: Acclaim
Platform: Saturn
Format: Single CD-ROM
Developer: Iguana
Release: Now

Maybe it's an unexplained curse, or perhaps something even more ominous that has given companies fits when they have tried to port their successful 16-Bit football franchises to the 32-Bit arena. It seems like a case of industry-wide growing pains. Whatever the case may be, many companies like Acclaim are beginning to muddle through these problems...one year at a time.

Many improvements have been made over the previous incarnation of the game with no doubt that most of them are sorely needed. It appears that a great deal of attention has been paid to juicing up the aesthetics of the game. To a certain extent, Iguana was successful. The graphics have been notably upgraded by adding more detailed and colorful players that include jersey numbers among other things. QB Club also falls in line with the current trend of sports games by providing detailed, 3-D rendered stadiums relatively accurate to their corresponding team.

Unfortunately, the graphics are not entirely impressive. Although the version of QB Club previewed at press time was nearly complete, the players still moved sluggishly, and became intolerably pixelated when they moved anywhere close to the foreground.



Now that the task of reaching the end-zone is complete, you can rub it in with a dance.

Quarterback Clubs strengths lie with its large, diverse playbook that can make for an excellent chess match. It contains over 500 plays, sorted by formation and the amount of yards they are designed to gain. Also impressive is the variety of kickoff coverage and blocking patterns available—a small tidbit of strategy often overlooked by many other football games. Each quarterback has, in some small part, his own stylized playbook due to the addition of several "Signature Plays" that are specially designed for each quarterback .

Each quarterback has, in some small part, his own stylized playbook

Another non-gameplay-oriented features worth noting is a user-definable camera which allows you to view the action as preferred. This is an excellent option that empowers the user to change the game "camera" through a gambit of variables to suit their needs. Also entertaining is a Quarterback Club feature that has been passed down through the years—the option to re-enact historical moments and pressure situations from football games past.

With the '97 version of Quarterback Club nearing completion, this struggling line of pigskin titles is beginning to show some visible signs of life on the 32-Bit platforms. The biggest question regarding this series of football games is how many years it will take to succeed in delivering a polished product.

While Acclaim and the Iguana development team have taken positive strides aimed at substantially upgrading an abysmal Saturn '96 edition, it appears that the '97 edition would benefit from a considerable amount of improvement.

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One of the most annoying things about helicopters is that they can only carry so many weapons at once. The engineers at Virgin have rectified this problem, thus allowing for scenes like this to be not only possible, but probable.

Black Dawn

Virgin's intense flight simulation sacrifices realism, but shows terrific promise

Publisher: Virgin

Platform: PlayStation

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Black Ops Entertainment

Release: Now

Now that the new generation of home game consoles have polygon capability, it's only logical that companies are starting to bring out flight simulators, long a mainstay of the PC gaming industry. The main difference, of course, is the average console gamer's demographic; they typically want a game that they can slap in the machine and just play, without having to memorize lots of esoteric controls or worry about mundane realism. Black Dawn is of a new generation of sims; a game that sacrifices realism for sheer fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants excitement.

Black Dawn puts you in the pilot's seat of a heavily armed helicopter gunship. As the game opens, you are sent in to quell a terrorist attack in New York's Central Park. Here's where reality flies out of the window—these terrorists must be extremely well-backed, as they attack you with tons of helicopters and ground vehicles. (Not to mention that you'd think someone would notice them setting up radar installations and SAM batteries inside the park...) But you won't care, as the action gets heavy seconds after the game starts, and the fairly intuitive chopper controls (which, again, have little basis in reality) become second nature, as you fire guided missiles at your many targets.

From there, the missions range from plausible to fantastic. Most of the missions take place in other countries around the world such as China and Israel. One mission that I found particularly humorous was a mission in LA where you are sent in to eradicate a neighborhood of designated "crackhouses." Somehow, the idea of sending a helicopter gunship in to pelt a bunch of pistol-wielding hoods with laser-guided missiles seems somewhat fanciful. However, these slumlords have spent their drug money well, they counterattack with SAMs launched from their low riders.

In fact, in the typical mission, you'll find out that the game's power-up system is almost necessary, since there's no way you'd be able to take on the hordes of terrorists and other bad guys with a standard weapons loadout. As you eliminate threats, they will often leave behind a power-up, good for more weapons, fuel or armor. Additionally, if you're looking for one particular power-up, sometimes you can shoot the ones you don't need to transform them into the ones you do....if they don't explode instead. It's a good thing this game isn't trying to be realistic, as you'll probably need to keep your missiles filled to capacity—a whopping 60 projectiles hanging from your wing...not to mention the napalm, unguided rockets and a chain gun that your gunship is also armed with.

...a game that sacrifices realism for sheer fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants excitement.

Carnage abounds from both airborne and ground enemies during an attempt to rescue hostages.

One of the most compelling features of Black Dawn is the soundtrack which is a dynamically changing score, reminiscent of the best action-movie soundtracks. You'll feel pumped as you swoop over Central Park laying waste to APCs and tanks below.

Black Dawn also features multiple perspectives, which allow the armchair pilot to look out of the left or right windows. While these features are nice, I found myself using them sparingly if at all while playing through the game, since the chopper is much easier to fly when you're looking out of the front of the cockpit. Graphically, this early version flies at an impressive 30 frames-per-second, with no slowdown apparent. Enemies are detailed and realistic, and there's lots of scenery to destroy or inadvertently fly into. The horizon is far enough that you won't notice much pop-up, which is also masked by a convincing fog effect, and the terrain is quite varied.

Apparently, Black Ops Entertainment, who developed the disappointing F-111 Agile Warrior, has learned several hard lessons from their previous title.

Black Dawn's 3-D objects are richly detailed, and more importantly, they look pretty darn good when falling to the ground—in many pieces.

Taking full advantage of the PlayStation's processing power the Mega Man series enters new territory, featuring intense scrolling backgrounds and happy cheese.

Mega Man 8

He can't be stopped! Mega Man makes his way to 32-Bit platforms

It's almost a guarantee that at any given moment Capcom is working on a new addition to their popular Mega Man series. The most recent development is Mega Man 8, Capcom's first endeavor in bringing Mega Man beyond the 16-Bit barrier that confined him before.

As fans of the series will know immediately, Dr. Wily is once again attempting world domination. With eight new robot fiends at his disposal and an improved fortress of his own, it's up to Mega Man to thwart Wily's plans once again. In true Mega Man tradition, our stocky hero gains the weapon of each boss once he's defeated them, but Mega Man starts the game with two weapons this time around. The tried-and-true Mega Buster of old remains intact, with the second weapon being the Mega Ball, a cybernetic soccer ball that packs a punch. In addition to these, however, Mega Man 8 follows the lead of the seventh game and the X series by providing Mega Man with many additional upgrades to collect, cleverly hidden throughout the game's levels. Upgrades include new transformations for Rush and shot modifiers, giving Mega Man more of an arsenal than ever before.

If Capcom continues to improve the series, as it has for the 32-Bit systems, Mega Man could be around for quite awhile.

...vividly colorful levels look exceptionally crisp and clear...

As traditional as the gameplay may be for the series, players will notice cosmetic changes from the very start. The hero himself features a more traditional anime look a la the X series, as does the entire game. A total animation makeover, every enemy and obstacle is given cartoon-quality animation, also increasing the number of moves at their disposal. The vividly colorful levels look exceptionally crisp and clear compared to their ancestors, using the PlayStation and Saturn's color palettes to their fullest.

The sound has also been upgraded equally, boasting peppy musical scores, fortunately returning to the tune quality missing during Capcom's 16-Bit days. The sound effects pans in stereo and fade as our hero moves away from their sources, making the game's aural presentation more robust than most 32-Bit titles available now. Finally, the game's control has received a small addition—the ability to equip any weapon in addition to the Mega Buster, reducing the amount of frenzied weapon switching experienced with previous games. Despite the market's tendency toward a 3-D gaming world, it's refreshing to see Capcom staying with their 2-D roots. All of these new features promise to keep the eighth installment as fresh as the first, but also retain the familiarity and atmosphere of the series.

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Publisher: Capcom
Platform: Saturn and PS
Format: Single CD-ROM
Developer: Capcom
Release: January '97

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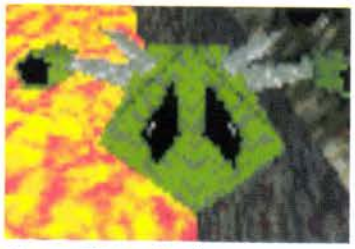
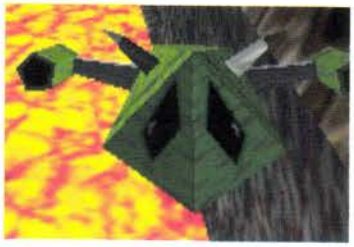


Descent™II: Destination Quartzon 3D Without Righteous 3D



Descent™II: Destination Quartzon 3D With Righteous 3D

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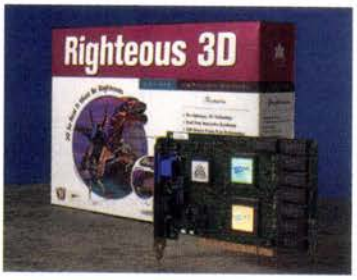

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The arcade Virtual On utilizes a special dual-joystick setup to give a realistic feeling of control when fighting. Unfortunately, there are no current plans to bring out such a stick for the home version.

Virtual On

Sega's latest arcade port uses the concept of CyberSled, but does it right

Publisher: Sega of America
Platform: Saturn
Format: Single CD-ROM
Developer: Sega's AM3
Release: November

With a glut of 3-D fighters, racers and point-and-shoot games currently on the market, Sega's Virtual On provides something a bit off the beaten path. Part MechWarrior, part fighting game, Virtual On provides a completely new style of play for those who have become jaded with the current flood of me-too games. VO borrows from MechWarrior-style games in that you control a mech, but it has none of the mission-based play or cumbersome controls of games in the MechWarrior genre. Conversely, Virtual On clearly builds off of current fighting games with fast gameplay, texture-mapped characters and arenas with bitmap backdrops and one-on-one arena-based battles; but the larger, obstacle-strewn arenas and the focus on use of both short- and long-distance weapons make VO like no other fighting game.

The gameplay's structure is much like current fighting games. Two mechs fight it out in an arena, with each hit diminishing the opposing mech's energy bar, until one mech is dead. However, instead of the wide variety of moves generally found in fighting games, Virtual On substitutes a much simpler three-attack scheme with a much heavier emphasis on complete freedom of motion. Each mech has a long-range weapon, a shorter-range weapon which is generally a remote detonated device of some sort, and a special weapon which is primarily hand-to-hand. Also notable is that each weapon has a charge bar which is reduced upon use, and recharges as time passes, forcing players to use as much variety in their attacks as possible. Finally, the arenas' many obstacles add complexity to the game's tactics by providing places to hide—but only against certain attacks; it is generally possible to lob a short-range weapon like a bomb over an obstacle, and there is of course always the option of a frontal assault using the ever-present jump-jets.

So far, in its early state, the home version of Virtual On looks like it will be a near-perfect arcade port.

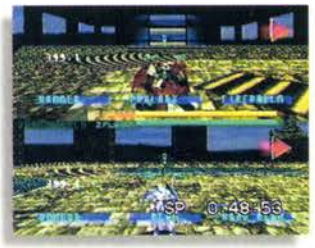
Also unique to Virtual On is the control scheme: The arcade had two sticks, each with its own trigger and thumb button. The sticks were used for movement, allowing turning, lateral motion, forward and backward movement and jumping and crouching. The triggers were used to fire the short- and long-range weapons, with both triggers being hit simultaneously to use the special weapon, and either thumb button being used to activate the turbo boost. The Saturn version attempts to simulate this with the standard controller, and partially succeeds, but it will take some getting used to for those accustomed to the arcade setup.

The Saturn version does have to compromise in some areas, though. Where the arcade had two separate screens to play head-to-head, the U.S. version of Virtual On will have to make due with a Split-Screen Mode since the U.S. Saturn will not have a link cable. While this is cramped, it does a reasonably good job of maintaining a good field of view and keeps the game very playable. However, Split-Screen does have another downside: AM3 is aiming to keep the frame rate at 30+ fps, but Split-Screen Mode is significantly harder to do, so maintaining the frame rate will be a challenge.

Where the arcade had two screens to play head-to-head, the U.S. Saturn version will have to make due with a Split-Screen Mode.

All in all, there's no question that AM3 has their work cut out for them with Virtual On, but if all goes well, Saturn owners will have a refreshingly different (but equally high-quality) game to play this November.

Lions and tigers and mechs, oh my! Virtual On's cast of fighters is nothing short of extreme, with creatively designed mech warriors that pack a wicked punch.



For two-player action, there's a Split-Screen Mode. The Japanese version will have linkup capability.

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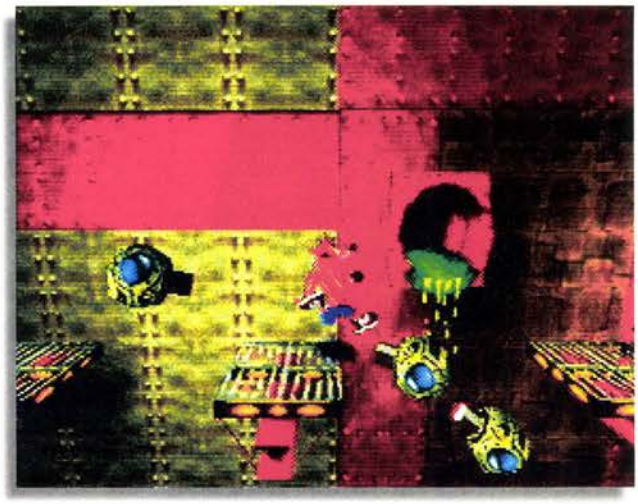

The perspectives in Crash Bandicoot are periodically changed from level to level, adding new play dynamics while also offering several changes of pace.

Crash Bandicoot

Sony unleashes its furry answer (and mascot?) to Mario and Sonic

Publisher: Sony C.E.A.
Platform: PlayStation
Format: Single CD-ROM
Developer: Naughty Dog
Release: Now

Naughty Dog must be credited with pulling off some excellent effects during gameplay. The bridge scene in this picture displays some of the fog effects.

Crash Bandicoot continues in the Sega-started tradition of bringing random animals to the small screen. Crash escapes from the castle of the evil Dr. Neo Cortex, surviving a failed use of the doctor's insidious Vortex machine, used to transform Crash into the leader of the doctor's private army, the Cortex Commandos. Just before falling from the castle heights and washing ashore a not-so-distant island, Crash hears Dr. Cortex readying a buxom female bandicoot for the Vortex. It's up to Crash to bound and spin through 30 levels and three different islands to save this potential bride-to-be.

While never presented so cleanly before, Crash's movements in and out of the screen have all been done in the past and the side-scrolling portions do the same. The odd camera angle, however, often makes Crash more difficult than it needs to be; making a large number of the game's jumps difficult to judge and time, causing some of Crash's levels to be frustrating. Adding fuel to the fire is Naughty Dog's obvious knowledge of these areas, attempting to make up for them with high numbers, albeit much-needed numbers, of level checkpoints and providing players with unhidden caches of extra men. Crash's gameplay flaws stack up from there, however. The ability to "kill" power-ups and items is a bothersome "feature" given a number of the game's situations, and the ability to save only at the end of the bonus levels would be fine if they didn't become increasingly difficult to survive as players move through the game. To top it off, every handful of levels is punctuated with an enormously easy and unoriginal boss.

Crash's flaws pretty much end at the gameplay, fortunately. Crash's graphics are glorious throughout, blending superb lighting, textures and transparencies to perfection. While the game only offers a handful of texture sets and level styles, they all look remarkable from start to finish. The game never shows any sign of frame dropping, even in the most detailed of scenes. Crash's characters animate smoothly and are mostly untextured, giving them a clean, cartoonish look.

The game never shows any sign of frame dropping, even in the most detailed of scenes.

Each level features equally impressive sound effects. The game's music, when there is any, is rare and uninspired, first shown in Crash's personal ditty, Warner Bros.-style opening and all. The atmospheric jungle noises add much to the game's atmosphere, however, and make up for the game's relative lack of actual musical ability.

Crash's control is quickly picked up and mastered, with the only adjustment pertaining to the game's 3-D design itself.

Faults aside, Crash Bandicoot is a visual and aural treat unlike any other.

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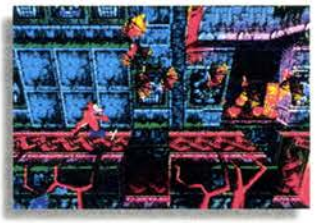

The stunning amount of detail in the graphics add to the game, giving each of the game's levels a unique personality.

GRAPHICS: A
+ The best graphics on the PlayStation to date.
- 3-D scrolling can become confusing at times especially when jumps are attempted

SOUNDS: B-
+ Excellent sound quality for various effects.
- Lackluster music adds little to game enjoyment.

GAMEPLAY: C-
+/- Extremely generic platform gameplay.
- Camera angles make jumping difficult in many levels. Uninspired bosses.

LASTING POWER: B
+ 30+ levels not including the bonus levels. The inclusion of many hidden objects.
- Too many 1-Ups given to be difficult in the long run.

OVERALL B-

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While gamers who didn't get into Street Fighter won't find this version any more appealing, fans will appreciate added characters, combos and backgrounds.

Street Fighter Alpha 2

Publisher: Capcom

Platform: PS/Saturn

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Capcom

Release: Now

When Street Fighter Alpha appeared on the PlayStation, many hailed it as the proof that the PlayStation was just as able at 2-D games as it was at 3-D games, despite the nearly flat backgrounds and limited character animation in SFA.

Street Fighter Alpha 2, as the title suggests, is the latest in the nearly interminable line of Capcom's Street Fighter series. Joining the fray are several new characters, including Sakura, an original character with an unhealthy crush on Ryu; Gen, an old man who returns from the original Street Fighter; Dhalsim and Zangief from Street Fighter II and Rolento, an end boss from Final Fight. Gladly, Capcom hasn't lost that Street Fighter "feel," which already puts the game ahead of the competition in the 2-D arena.

In Street Fighter Alpha 2, the Chain Combos which pervaded its predecessor are thankfully gone.

In Street Fighter Alpha 2, the Chain Combos which pervaded its predecessor are thankfully gone. While some will mourn their passing, I feel that their removal adds to the game—after all, I don't think players should take more damage from an unblocked weak attack than from an unblocked fierce attack. The other major change from Street Fighter Alpha is the addition of the Custom Combo, which drains out your super meter but allows you to perform any move you want with virtually no recovery time, making for easy (and insane) combos—worse yet, they are not blockable when they are initiated at close range.

Also changed are the Alpha Counters, as each character now has a high and a low counter, neither of which are typically as effective as they were in the first game. But other than that, this is a Street Fighter game, and those who never liked Street Fighter probably won't be persuaded by this version.

While the old characters have remained more or less the same, the new characters are a varied bunch, with some very interesting gameplay ideas. Gen is probably the most fascinating of the bunch. Although he is not the most effective character, he is the only one who can switch fighting styles in mid-match by hitting all three punch buttons or all three kick buttons. Rolento is sort of reminiscent of Fei Long and Vega, as he has a triple-baton technique as well as a wall bounce-type move. Sakura has all of Ryu's moves—that's because she's his biggest admirer, and has taught herself versions of all of his techniques.

In terms of options, SFA2 gives the player many, although I was expecting some that are conspicuously missing. The speed and difficulty can be set from one to eight stars, and Capcom has provided players with a sound test mode—but the original arcade tunes are not on the disc, as they have been replaced by decent arranged versions.

Those simply looking for an exciting fighting experience or an accurate gameplay translation of the arcade won't be let down by Street Fighter Alpha 2 in the least. Just don't expect arcade perfection, as many players do nowadays—you will be disappointed if you do, and hopefully, the Saturn version will have some of those details restored.

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The addition of Custom Combos lets players perform super-nasty, funky-fresh moves against their opponents. Transversely, it can happen to you!!

A tasty bonus added to Street Fighter 2 allows players to change their character's fighting style in the middle of a bout.

GRAPHICS: B

+ Well-designed backgrounds with lots of animation and color.
- Little details are missing, if you look close enough.

SOUNDS: B+

+ Music is decent, lots of voices for the characters.
- No option to select the original arcade music.

GAMEPLAY: A-

+ No more chain combat! Yippee!
- Custom combos are interesting but a little overpowered...

LASTING POWER: A-

+ Lots of characters to choose from, and fairly deep in gameplay to boot.
- When you have lots of characters, balance becomes an issue...

OVERALL A-

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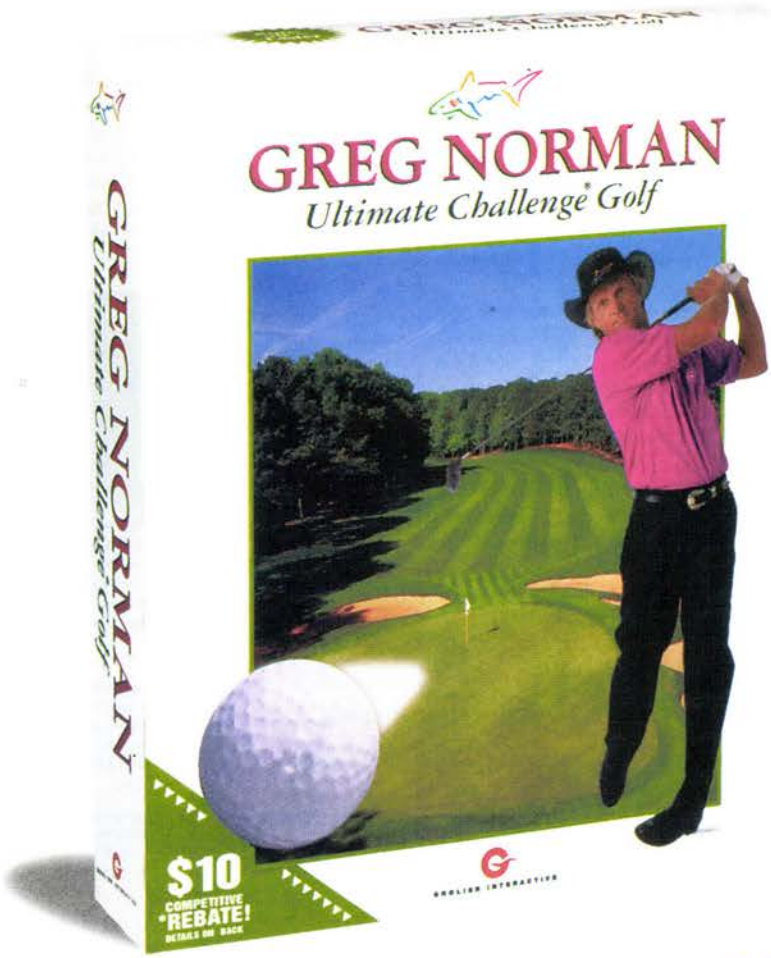
–Computer Gaming World, July '96



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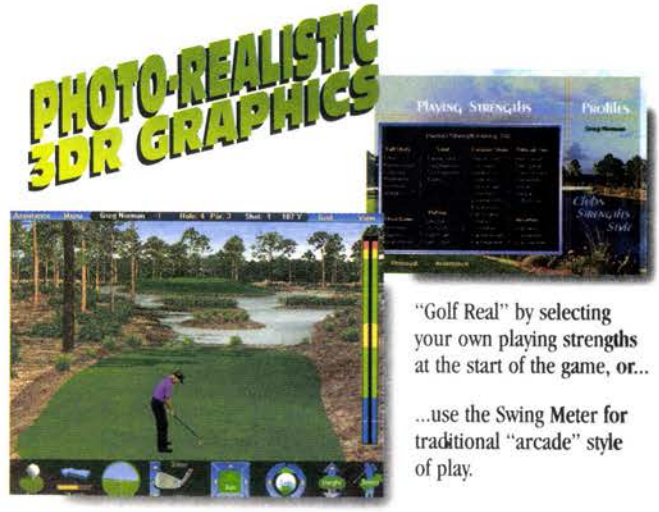

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At 60 frames-per-second, Tobal No.1 can keep up with the likes of Virtua Fighter but fails to match some of the visual flare. Regardless, this should not taint a credible first attempt by Square.

Tobal No. 1

Square quells the critics with their first fighting game release to date

Publisher: Square
Platform: PlayStation
Format: Single CD-ROM
Developer: Dream Factory
Release: Now (Japan)

When the news first broke that Square would be entering the fighting game market, many were skeptical, and rightly so—after all, although Square did have a history of making games that weren't necessarily role-playing games (Rad Racer, anyone?), they certainly had no experience developing fighting games. Add to that the fact that Tobal No. 1 was going to be their first PlayStation title, and you had a potential disaster.

Fortunately, Square got some of the industry's best and brightest to work on the title, including people from Capcom, Sega and Namco, three of the biggest fighting game developers, as well as Akira Toriyama to do character design, who has several games and a very popular anime and manga series called Dragon Ball to his credit.

At first glance, Tobal looks like the designers set the Way-back machine a few years, as texture-mapping is very sparingly used. Instead, the designers have chosen to use a combination of flat and Gouraud-shaded polygons to build the characters, making it look like an enhanced version of the original Virtua Fighter. Undoubtedly, this was done to keep the frame rate up, which appears to be 60 fps, and run the game in a high-resolution mode. But the game doesn't stack up visually to the best 3-D fighters on the PlayStation, although the motion capture is very convincing and the animation fluid with nary a drop in frame rate.

For audio, the music is an above-average mix of techno stylings and real instruments.

Where Tobal departs radically from the norm is in its play mechanics; instead of having your character jump by pressing up on the pad, that function has now been moved to one of the buttons, allowing the up and down directions to control your fighter's lateral movement. You have three attack buttons: one for high attacks, another for middle strikes and yet another to attack your opponent's legs. Combos are standard Virtua Fighter-style—a typical combo is high, medium, medium for a high punch followed by two side kicks. But those who have their brain hardwired for Virtua Fighter will likely be baffled by the controls for a while.

Once you grab your opponent, you need to press a combination of buttons to actually throw or strike...

Tobal's throwing system is also unique; to initiate a grapple, you simply push block and middle attack. Once you grab your opponent, you need to press a combination of buttons to execute a throw or strike; for example, hitting low attack while in a grapple will cause you to kick your opponent in the shin. This gives the character who is grabbed an opportunity to reverse the throw.

Another unique feature in Tobal is the Quest Mode, which puts you in a rather simplistic 3-D dungeon and gives you various missions to accomplish.

Despite the lack of visual flash, Tobal is a solid although unconventional fighting game, and does show that Square can develop solid non-RPG PlayStation titles. Hopefully, their forthcoming Bushido Blade will demonstrate a similar level of originality.

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Watch particularly nasty moves over and over again. Tobal offers a number of unique camera views in fight sequences.

Players used to the standard Virtua Fighter control scheme will have to forget what they have learned in the past and adapt to Tobal's unique controls.

GRAPHICS: B
+ High resolution and high frame rates are good.
- Minimal texture mapping makes the game look primitive.

SOUNDS: B
+/- Tunes are good but nothing truly outstanding.
+ Sound effects are groovy but not incredible.

GAMEPLAY: B+
+/- Unique (although) slightly confusing) controlling scheme.
+ Interesting grappling move, I kinda felt funny when I watched it.

LASTING POWER: B+
+ Quest Mode and the addition of new characters will keep you playing for a while.

OVERALL B+

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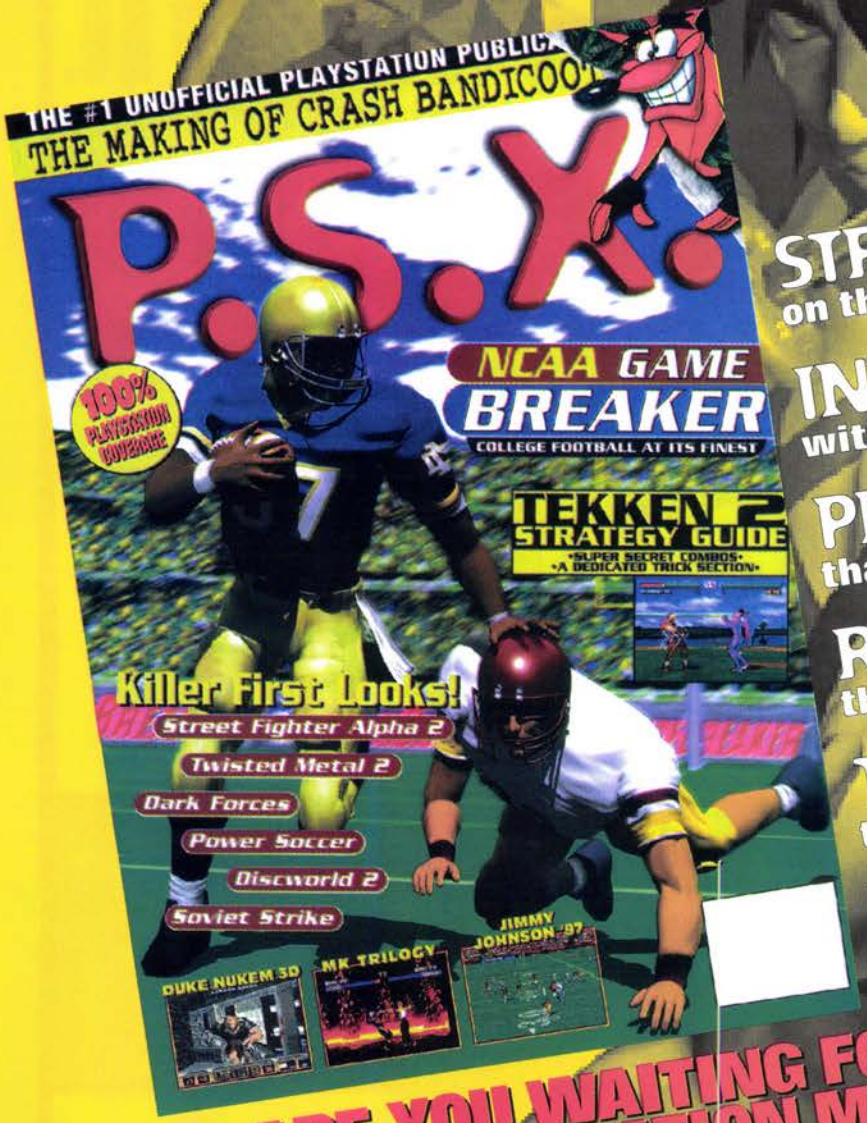

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For more info, visit Sega's web site at http://www.sega.com or on Compuserve at GO SEGA.

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SEGA SATURN

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Saturn Bomberman

The ultimate party game explodes onto the 32-Bit scene in grand fashion

Publisher: Hudson Soft
Platform: Saturn
Format: Single CD-ROM
Developer: Hudson Soft
Release: Now (Japan)

From his first appearance on the NES and then on to many other platforms, Bomberman has continued to be the premier character associated with multi-player party games.

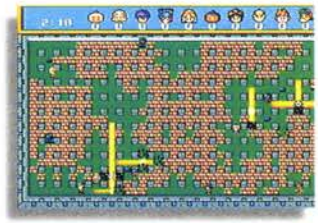
Bomberman has three main modes of play including a normal game, a sort of quest mode in which Bomberman travels through each stage in a top-down perspective destroying obstacles. By doing so, he obtains more powerful bombs and related items that give him abilities to toss and kick them. Up to two players can play on the screen at once to destroy a large assortment of interesting enemies, most of which unfortunately lack any aggression or artificial intelligence at all.

Unlike the Bombermans of the past, this one features a few graphical enhancements such as trains that move overhead and a pirate ship with cannons that fire. Each level contains these kinds of embellishments that serve to enhance what would otherwise be a rather bland environment, made up of so few colors it could be mistaken for another 16-Bit game. Every seventh stage, a boss appears and attacks in a variety of ways until he is destroyed with multiple hits.

The basic play remains the same: Bomberman becomes more powerful by collecting items and then moving on to the next board. By the time a player reaches the later stages, an incredible arsenal is at his disposal—until a game continue is used.

Having said this, Bomberman would still be a great arcade-like experience worthy of its own merits even without the famous battle game and the puzzle-oriented master game.

Battle game is where Bomberman earned its claim to fame, truly ranking as a classic. With two multitaps, up to eight players can play on eight different fields in a tournament in which survival is the only rule. No sport nor racing game could ever hold a candle to the thrill of blowing up seven of your closest friends—and then having them all retaliate by teaming up to destroy you first next time.



Rumor has it that the Unabomber played a key role in some of the more complex levels of Saturn Bomberman. Just kidding.

Hudson tried to expand this even further by offering a 10-player mode called "wide stage," but the results of this experiment are mixed. This mode doesn't offer the variety that choosing from multiple does, and the screen becomes so much smaller that were it not for the hazards of trying to gather 10 people around a television, the screen would still be too small to make this play mode anything more than a gimmick.

Saturn Bomberman isn't just a power trip, though, it's more like a meat-and-potatoes staple that, like a solid Street Fighter game, helps define the hardware's library.

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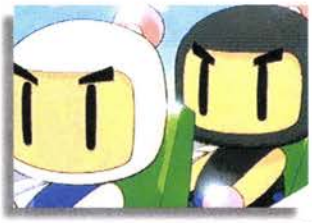


With the power of the 32-Bit processor behind it, Bomberman's opening sequences are more entertaining than ever.

No sport nor racing game could ever hold a candle to the thrill of blowing up seven of your closest friends.

GRAPHICS: B+
+ Clean animated graphics make the objects clear and enemies easy to see.
- Except in 10-player mode, which is way too small.

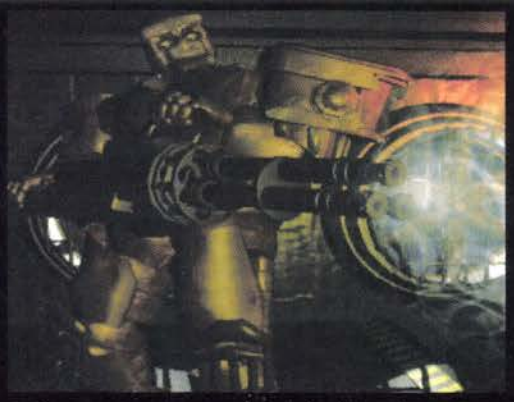
SOUNDS: B+
+ The same music from previous Bomberman exists here only with more channels.
- Whatever happened to orchestrated music if the CD is going to be used?

GAMEPLAY: A
+ It's a good one-player game, and a great multi-player game.
- Less power-ups than some versions.

LASTING POWER: A
+ Being the best party game on the planet generally means it retains its play value.

OVERALL A–

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED



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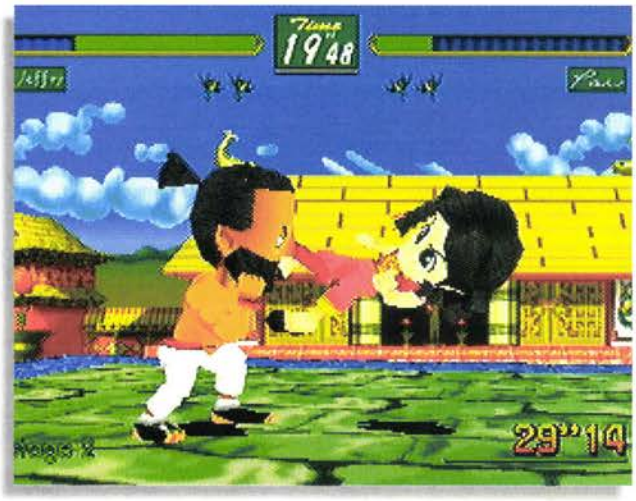

The Virtua Fighters take a step back in time to the glorious days of their childhood. Ah, I remember childhood...shooting spitballs at chicks, leaving whoopie-cushions on the teacher's chair...life was good.

Virtua Fighter Kids

Sega's young offers a fresh look, but little new substance

Publisher: Sega of Japan
Platform: Saturn
Format: Single CD-ROM
Developer: AM2
Release: Now

Virtua Fighter Kids can be summed up in a single word: cute. For most gamers, though, the decision has to be made of whether the same basic game is worth purchasing for a second time.

Essentially, that's what VFK is—the same game that stormed Saturn owners worldwide last year. VFK retains all of the moves, characters, depth and playability from Sega's original hit, VF2. With this in mind, the perceived value of an extraordinary game is thrown into serious and immediate jeopardy.

On one hand, it has the same gameplay that many heralded only a year ago as the best fighting game ever. On the other hand, it's a game that the people most fascinated have already paid for once.

This perception of value is something every gamer will have to weigh individually.

Suffice it to say, though, that in the simplest terms, VF Kids is the same game as VF2, except for a few small options (such as making the unused buttons of the pad programmable), the shortening of range in some attacks due to the shorter characters and that somehow the moves seem easier to execute, even in "normal" mode.

While "normal" mode is basically the same as VF2, all "kids mode" really does is make repeatedly tapping a Punch or Kick button result in automatic combinations. It seems that this mode selection is part of how VF Kids was designed to address a younger and less experienced fighting gamer in Japan.

Reinforcing this appeal to a younger generation, all of the characters appear in super-deformed form. In other words, they're all short and stocky with big heads and wide eyes. Some of the cute changes include Shun's drinking of tea instead of saki and Kage's snaggle-toothed mug hidden behind that mask of his.

What's even more funny than Kage's two-toothed smile, though, is watching his giant head plow into an enemy after his tiny body flips through the air. The fighters have so much personality now that one has to almost lament the fact that these fantastic characters are limited to a VF2 clone instead of being used to bring an RPG to life.

Every measure to make the game as cute as possible has been taken from the chipmunk-sounding voices to the opening and individual ending cinemas.

All the backgrounds have been redone and the slightly cleaned-up graphics make for impressive instant replays of special moves. Music however, is less changed, containing some keyboard remixing and is a little less punchy than the original. Somehow it isn't as funky as the old, remixed VF2 music.

With everything said and done, VF Kids is an excellent way for Virtua fans to pass the time while they wait anxiously for VF3 to arrive. That is, of course, as long as they're willing to risk the therapy needed after watching a midget-sized Lau beat up on an innocent-looking toddler like Pai.

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It has the same gameplay that many heralded only a year ago as the best fighting game ever.

The pint-sized characters from Virtua Fighter and VF2 are just too cute. All of the moves from VF2 are retained, with the addition of some new VF Kids-only moves.

Each character has a variety of cute facial expressions and animations that add appeal to the game. Chicks will dig it. Really, they will.

GRAPHICS: A
+ The same clean, hi-res polygons with detailed textures from VF2 are found.
+ Excellent FMV intro and individual ending cinemas.

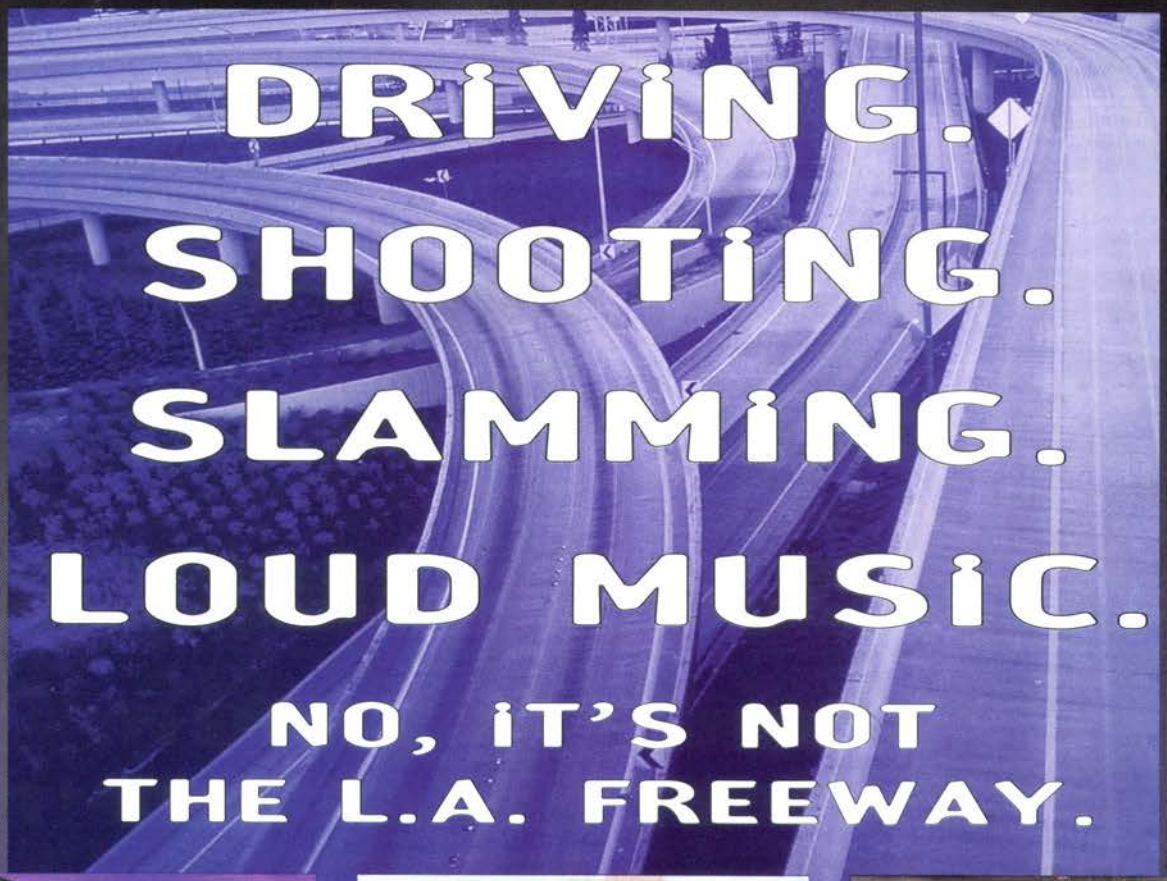
SOUNDS: A
+ VF2 sound effects and voice, only faster and muffled.
+ The easily enjoyable VF2 tunes return with slight remixing.

GAMEPLAY: B+
+ It's essentially the same game as VF2.
- It's essentially the same game as VF2.

LASTING POWER: B-
+ It's a great fighting game with incredible depth...
+ As with any fighter, two-player mode increases its life many fold.

OVERALL B+

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED



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It's a no-brainer mission objective: Simply go in and kill everything that appears to be alive. The only problem is, aiming and shooting your weapon will prove to be the biggest challenge of the game.

Project Overkill

Konami's newest U.S. "Project" shoots high but falls quite short

Publisher: Konami
Platform: PlayStation
Format: Single CD-ROM
Developer: Konami
Release: Now

Konami's U.S. development house takes a shot at developing an isometric action shooter, but unfortunately falls flat in the process. Project Overkill is a game of little substance, substantial gore and more ridiculous odds than most players will want to hack at.

Humanity has spread itself amongst the stars and encountered many alien races, both friendly and hostile.

Players lead a squad of shock troops to end the alien threat in a series of missions throughout the colony. Four lives are given to complete the game, each in the form of a different operative.

Players start the game with a few explosive devices, a handful of machine gun ammo and even less energy rounds; making ammo for the better weapons available in the game's later missions. Missions range from pure slaughter to more "involved" reconnaissance missions, requiring players to locate items, destroy strategic targets and remove eyes, hands and keycards to get through security. One nice feature is the branching mission structure, letting players move through the potential 16 missions in their own way, reaching one of the game's final goals in as few as six missions.

Combat interaction with the game is not the only difficult thing plaguing Project Overkill.

It all sounds nice on paper, but Konami's execution is flawed.

Players can even walk through their recently departed enemies, tracking their blood all over the floor. Silly aliens!

Control is awkward at best. Players can shoot up, down, left and right, giving players the impression that firing direction and actual movement are independent of each other a la Smash TV, but in order to achieve accuracy, players must stand still and fire in those cardinal directions, as the enemies move around the game's environments far more deftly than the player could.

Combat interaction with the game is not the only difficult thing plaguing Project Overkill, as Konami felt a need to use every button on the controller, resulting in similarly awkward inventory use and weapon selection, not to mention use of the game's menu-based mission briefing front end. Because of this, the game is very difficult.

When a mission is failed, players are given another crack at it with another agent, but all of the previous agent's damage has already been repaired, keeping the chances of completion low. While players can replay any mission they desire and move about the world freely, it's unlikely they will get far enough to take advantage of this, or really want to.

The animation throughout the game is good, but severely limited, as each level has only enough enemy types to count on one hand. One nice graphic flourish is the walls' ability to become transparent when approached, easing navigation, but the more complex levels quickly bog down the processor with transparencies and other sprites, resulting in frame dropping. Overkill's sound is comparably lackluster, sounding only a few sound effects of good recording quality, but little value beyond that.

Hopefully, Project Overkill will remain nothing more than a lone misfire on Konami America's record. As it stands now, however, the game is too full of flaws to be a worthwhile game.

The first thing players will notice is the massive amounts of blood and gore in this game. The carnage may be one of the main selling points of the game.

GRAPHICS: B-
+ Smooth SGI-rendered animation. Wall transparency makes navigation easier.
- Very little art and dull environment graphics.

SOUNDS: B-
+ Good sound effect quality.
- Few unique sound effects. Droning music becomes tiresome quickly.

GAMEPLAY: C-
+ Varied missions and objectives.
- Horrible control makes the game nearly impossible to play.

LASTING POWER: B
+ Branching mission structures with multiple endings.
- Who will want to go back and play again though?

OVERALL C+

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Though they don't exactly look like the prototypical participants in a fighting game, these fighters hurt just the same as we do when they get their face bashed in by a glowing sword.

Star Gladiator

Capcom finally gives 3-D a shot with the release of their new, futuristic fighter

Publisher: Capcom
Platform: PlayStation
Format: Single CD-ROM
Developer: Capcom
Release: November

For the last five years, players have been wondering, "So, when is Street Fighter III coming out?" A reasonable question, given the fact that Capcom has released six Street Fighter games using essentially the same 2-D engine since the classic Street Fighter II came out in '91.

Star Gladiator represents a big departure for Capcom, as they have finally ventured into the realm of 3-D polygon fighters with their own design.

The arcade version of Star Gladiator is driven by a PlayStation-compatible engine, so it's no surprise that the home translation is virtually identical to its arcade counterpart. Graphically, the game is fairly impressive, easily pushing two detailed polygonal characters with limited Gouraud-shading and light-sourcing. Motion is smooth and realistic, with some particularly impressive moves. For example, the swordsman Gerelt has a series of moves that start with a flurry of rapid sword jabs, followed by a strike that sends his opponent into the air where he continues to attack. The music has been rescored from the arcade version, and while it probably won't win any awards for excellence, the game's audio is decent.

The characters range from the typical human fighter to weird aliens wielding killer yo-yos. The overall impression one gets from this motley crew of characters is "strange," which probably negatively affected the game's arcade appeal.

Controls are typical for the genre, using the directional pad and four buttons: block, vertical strike, horizontal strike and kick.

Nearly every 3-D fighter has a combo system that is derivative of Sega's Virtua Fighter, which had simple pre-programmed button presses to remember. Star Gladiator doesn't break from tradition, opting for a more flexible combo system which resembles that in Tekken 2. To help players learn the combos, a Training Mode is provided, which aids considerably by providing a flowchart of the various "Plasma Combos" which are displayed in the right corner of the screen.

Another gameplay feature is the "Plasma Counter" which allows the player to instantly counterattack an opponent's strike. Characters can also execute a blockable "Plasma Strike" once per round which is the equivalent of a Street Fighter super combo—a long windup, followed by a punishing hit. To be fair, Capcom doesn't break much new ground with this title, as nearly every feature has been done before in a 3-D fighter. The mix of old ideas still makes for a solid game. It's just too bad that it doesn't have that same "feel" that differentiates the 2-D Capcom fighters from their many imitators; I for one was hoping that Capcom would translate that feel to the third dimension. For a first attempt, Capcom did well, hopefully other games in this series will be more innovative.

They have finally ventured into the realm of 3-D polygonal fighters with a game of their own design.

The numerous different fighter sizes, shapes and designs make for some interesting bouts.

While nothing entirely outstanding, Star Gladiators holds its own aesthetically when put up against other 3-D fighting games.

GRAPHICS: A-
+ Solid-looking characters, nice special effects and a zippy frame rate.
- Character design is weird, and levels look plain.

SOUNDS: B
+ Good music and sound effects.
- Unfortunately, there is nothing fantastic.

GAMEPLAY: B+
+ Solid mix of ideas drawn from other 2-D and 3-D fighting games.
- Unfortunately, there is little, if any innovation.

LASTING POWER: B+
+ Star Gladiator is above average, and will certainly keep gamers interested.
- Though better than average, this game isn't as deep as it could have been.

OVERALL B+

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Hey Rustlers! Shoot the cows and they turn to steaks, then Spot can gobble them up like the closet carnivore he is. An example of the oddities that exist in the game.

Spot Goes to Hollywood

Spot, despondent over lost glory years with 7•Up, finds a new 32-Bit home

Publisher: Virgin
Platform: Saturn or PS
Format: Single CD-ROM
Developer: Burst
Release: Now

After over a year in development limbo, Burst, Virgin's newly titled in-house development team, puts the finishing touches on Spot Goes to Hollywood, the sequel to the SNES platformer, Cool Spot. However, players will likely prefer to see the strangely licensed series killed after this installment of soft drink mascot fun.

The game's intro pretty much sums up the game, even if in a rather odd way. Spot, the sunglassed red dot from the 7•Up cans, has been sucked into a movie screen where he must travel through three clichèd movie themes to return to the real world. Each theme: Pirate, Adventure and Horror, send Spot through six levels, the sixth of which ends with a boss. Five stars are hidden in each level, looking like those found on the walk of fame, and can be collected to access bonus mini-themes: Western, Dinosaur and Sci-Fi. Spot battles the cartoony foes with 7•Up bubbles like his previous adventure, with most enemies taking only one hit of this powerful weapon to destroy. Spot can also jump, and that's about it. Without more to do and interact with, a minuscule three bosses, many forced scroll levels, and no new gameplay or game elements to call its own, Spot Goes to Hollywood's 21 levels become repetitive and tiresome rather quickly. All of the game's forced scrolls mimic each other exactly, while the game is populated with a handful of enemies, using the same enemy attacks and AI over and over, just changing the graphics.

When Spot completes what seems to be an endless journey down the deck of a parrot-infested pirate ship, he reaches the giant octopus that he must defeat before moving on to do other strange things in the next level!

While the game uses one of the better isometric control schemes out there, the game is still full of cheap hits. Combined with a scarcity of checkpoints and three hits to a life, Spot Goes to Hollywood becomes a frustrating exercise in memorization and reaction. Like many other platform games, players can return to previously completed levels to find the rest of the game's secrets and any stars that they missed.

Spot goes to Hollywood becomes a frustrating exercise in memorization and reaction.

The enemies are choppily animated, which would not be a problem if the rest of the game were not rendered, and they were at least consistent with their surroundings.

The game's intentionally movie-like score is pleasantly arranged, but players will quickly find that all of the game's music sounds very much the same, adding to the game's already striking level of redundancy. Sound effects are a similar case, giving players several tired sound effects over and over. Repetitive and uninspired, it is a shame to see Spot Goes To Hollywood, Virgin's first title under the Burst label, plagued with flaws. But then again, it goes to show that Virgin should have left Spot when 7•Up did.

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When Spot gets tired of running down the deck of the ship, he can hi-jack a wayward cannon and enjoy the free ride until he gets his strength back.

GRAPHICS: B-
+ Nice rendered backdrops to gaze at.
- Choppy cartoon characters that don't quite fit their surroundings.

SOUNDS: C+
+ Well-orchestrated tunes.
- All the music sounds the same with equally repetitive sound effects.

GAMEPLAY: D+
+ Good control with a bit of practice.
- Cheap hits galore make for a very frustrating experience.

LASTING POWER: C+
+ Hidden bonus levels redeem the game somewhat.
- But who will want to find them?

OVERALL C-
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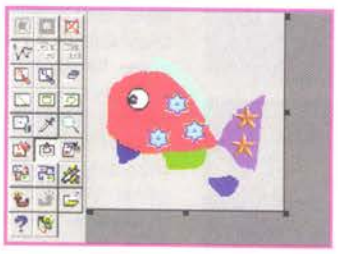

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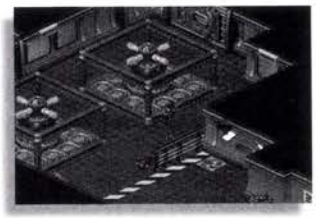

Crusader's isometric graphics are some of the best in computer games. Turn your attention to the far right and you will see some poor soldier being locked onto by one of the Crusader's weapons.

Crusader: No Regret

Origin cooks up a tasty appetizer before serving the long-awaited main course

Publisher: Origin Systems Inc.
Platform: DOS CD-ROM
Format: Single CD-ROM
Developer: Origin Systems Inc.
Release: Now

Within each room, there are generally a few interactive gadgets and places to explore and understand. If all else fails, just pull out all of your weapons and let it rip.

Crusader: No Remorse was a surprise hit for Origin when it shipped last year. The blend of action, strategy and a non-first-person perspective quickly sold far more copies than even Origin's most generous numbers predicted. Hoping to duplicate that success and bring new players into the fold in time for the real Crusader 2, Crusader: No Regret tweaks and refines the winning formula of the original game to perfection.

Having destroyed the World Economic Consortium's nuclear-ready Vigilance Platform, a lone Silencer floats through space in a life pod. Suddenly snatched from the stars by a Lunar Mining Cartel freighter, this elite soldier fights his former employers for the destruction of the LMC's base on the Moon to end their slave labor used in the mining of Dicoreallium, a mineral used to power Earth's fusion reactors.

Players must complete 10 missions to end the LMC's reign of lunar terror, and ultimately end the LMC altogether. Gameplay is identical to Crusader: No Remorse in every way, making No Regret more of a "mission disk" than anything else, despite the fact that it's a stand-alone game. No Regret gives players more bang for the buck than No Remorse, however, featuring much improved art, music,sound effects, full-motion video, topped off with tweaked gameplay.

No Regret fleshes out the Crusader arsenal nicely, giving the red-armored hero rocket launchers with faster firing rates, guns that freeze humans solid and shatter them with a second hit and many other assorted gore-spattering delights. As with the previous game, each weapon has a corresponding robot that uses that weapon. A number of devious new traps also appear in the game, including generators that deplete health or shield power when the player moves within range, turrets that emerge unexpectedly from the floor and slews of other unusual traps. All of these new features combined with multiple methods of completion and Crusader: No Regret is a worthy pseudo-sequel indeed.

No Regret's graphics have been upgraded beyond the extent of the Silencer's arsenal. Each level has a unique look, using little art from the previous game. Every rendered object takes visible damage from gunfire and explodes violently resulting in the damage of surrounding items. The first game's mediocre full-motion-video engine has been replaced by Wing Commander 4's impressive compression schemes that allow for 16-Bit color.

No Regret tweaks and refines the winning formula of the original to perfection.

Lastly, No Regret features many new sound effects, replacing many old ones with those of much better recording quality or entirely new effects.

Another top-notch Origin product all around, Crusader: No Regret will very easily whet players' appetites for destruction for the real feast—Crusader 2.

ig

In Crusader, shooting your way out of a mess is just as important as thinking your way out of one. If you can't do both, don't bother.

GRAPHICS: A
+ Large quantities of impressive original rendered art and animation.
+ Improved full-motion video engine allows 16-Bit color.

SOUNDS: A
+ 250 new sound effects that heighten the experience.
+ Nice rock/techno score.

GAMEPLAY: A-
+ Death at its finest if that's what you're into.
+/- Excellent use of isometric viewpoint. Improper exploration and strategizing usually results in death.

LASTING POWER: B-
+ Ten levels, each with multiple paths through them, keep players entertained.
- Lots of secrets, but few worth replay.

OVERALL A-

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

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-Nintendo Power Magazine

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-Nintendo Power Magazine

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Xing's graphic engine allows for very little detail and colors in addition to having very little diversity in each level—notice the low diversity of unimpressive textures in this picture.

Floating Runner

Publisher: T*HQ of America
Platform: PlayStation
Format: Single CD-ROM
Developer: Xing
Release: Now

In this fantastical tale, a player can choose between two characters: a boy named Lay or a pony-tailed girl named Cress. Both of them are inhabitants of a place called Crystal Land, which has recently been overtaken by the evil Zaurer, ruler of Chaos. To restore peace to Crystal Land, Cress and Lay must gather six crystals, one from each level.

A matched colored crystal from each of the six floating worlds is found at the end of the appropriately named Fire, Water, Forest, Sky, Desert and Swamp Worlds. As silly and contrived as that plot may seem, it's pretty standard in the world of platform video games and is easily enough dismissed once play has begun.

Subpar graphics and a disorienting, non-forgiving centralized camera view hurt the 3-D effect attempted by the developers of Floating Runner. Notice how the character's position is exactly the same in two different worlds.

As silly and contrived as the plot may seem, it's pretty standard in the world of platform video games.

What's harder to ignore is the game's poor play mechanics. Cress and Lay are controlled from a slightly adjustable over-the-shoulder view. The world itself seems to pivot or rotate as the character stays centered at the bottom of the screen, similar to how the car would stay centered in the golden years of sprite-based racing games. This makes for a very disorienting system of control which isn't just a matter of adaptation. For example, successful games such as Jumping Flash! may give the player the sensation of actual 3-D movement while Floating Runner always feels like the world is moving to you.

If somehow a player can get past this, he or she will find the standard platform play buttons such as the always-pressed run-button, jump, Toshinden-like left and right cartwheels and of course, the fire button. A variety of weapons can be found throughout the floating worlds, such as bombs, a boomerang and fire. These are the weapons that will be used to destroy all of the innocent-looking animal enemies such as frogs, penguins, bees and birds.

Destroying them releases gems that can be gathered for points, but touch them and lose hit points. Unfortunately, the character noticeably flickers like the 8-Bit days of slowdown whenever damaged. Devoid of many sound effects, this is all that will alert the player to injury. Having so few sound effects might not seem so bad, though, since it allows one to appreciate one of the game's few highlights, a soothing and surreal soundtrack, similar to Jumping Flash!

Try to find it in your heart to give poor Xing some leeway, though. As the industry transitions, every genre has been fraught with the trials and errors that are necessitated by evolution. True platform fans will appreciate Floating Runner for its original take on the idea of 3-D but for most everyone else, it should only be noticed as an experiment in platformers gone wrong.

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The picture above demonstrates how an unmoveable camera can destroy the playability of a 3-D platform game as much as a mobile one made Mario superb.

GRAPHICS: B-
+ Some of the special effects like transparencies can be really nice.
- Loosely constructed polygons, strange perspective.

SOUNDS: B+
+ The music, if a bit repetitive, is fairly enjoyable.
- Sound effects are desperately needed and missed.

GAMEPLAY: D
- The graphics don't just make the game ugly at times, but tedious too.
+ At least there's a continue feature, it pops up after every unexpected death.

LASTING POWER: C
+ It's frustrating enough to at least not be beaten too easily.
- There's nothing here in the way of options or two-player mode to keep anyone coming back.

OVERALL C-

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Q. *I just picked up your August issue after noticing it for the first time. I must say it is the most sophisticated out of all the other gaming mags to date, aside from* Next-Generation *which really isn't as informative as you are. I am a proud investor in the Sony PlayStation and have really enjoyed the games produced for it. I noticed that Sony introduced individual game company licensing for product support rather than a staunch single platform developer, such as Nintendo did in the past. My question is: Will Matsushita do the same with the M2? I also heard some rumors that the M2 was compatible with consoles such as the Saturn and 3DO, while also being able to play DVD movies and games. I also heard via Internet that there was to be a PlayStation 2. What is it? When does it come to the States? Lastly, I find it hard to believe that Nintendo would keep its software prices above $70 for a full year. This might weed out a few initial N64 buyers at the start but what are their plans once they do have enough consoles to go around?*

Jason Brandt
Dover, Delaware

A. First, regarding the M2 and individual game licensing—such specific questions such as those cannot be answered when bigger questions exist regarding the system. Next, the M2 will not be compatible with any other systems, although rumors regarding Sega existed a year ago. Lastly, don't fear the N64 cartridge prices. Nintendo has already shown they understand the marketplace with the price drop of the console to $199. Games such as Tetrisphere will hit shelves for substantially less.

Although many people fear that the Nintendo cartridge pricing will be sky-high, Nintendo already has several "more affordable" cartridges slated for release within months of the U.S. launch.

Q. *I hope I'm not wasting your time but I wanted to ask a few questions and I figured you guys could answer them for me.*

I'm really addicted to Tekken for the PlayStation/arcade and Tekken 2 for the arcade. Tekken 2 for the PlayStation should be great and I can't wait to see it. I wanted to ask you guys if you knew what the difference was in buying a game earlier than the release date from a company/distributor? What brought this question up was from me looking through several magazines and finding in the back, copies of Tekken 2 (PlayStation) for sale. It got me confused in the way that the release date for Tekken 2 (PlayStation) is September.

Should I go ahead and buy from these guys early or save my money and buy the game at its release date?

André DiNardo
Landenberg, PA

A. There are several answers to your question. Very often, mail-order companies will place games in their catalogs to simply entice customers to call them. Of course, the game has no chance of being in stock when you call, but it gives the salesman a chance to get you to put down a preorder of some sort. However, some of these stores import the games from Japan, a country which typically gets the best games months ahead of the U.S. The typical price for importing a game is around $100, although the price deviates according to popularity, and its relative U.S. release date.

After various reports contradicting each other, the Nintendo64 is said to have a physical lockout of Japanese games. Thankfully, it doesn't have a lockout on its groundbreaking controllers.

Q. *I travelled to Japan not long ago and played the N64 first-hand. I came back to the US with a charcoal colored N64 controller and I am now wondering if it is compatible with the U.S. version of the N64. Do you know the answer to this puzzling question?*

Anonymous
via the Internet

A. Even though Nintendo is reportedly going to lockout Japanese software from U.S. hardware, in the same manner that they did with the Super Nintendo, it is highly unlikely that your previously purchased joysticks won't work with the U.S. version of the Nintendo64. Doing such a complex lockout of its controllers would be a very costly and unnecessary (not to mention paranoid) maneuver on Nintendo's part.

By the time U.S. gamers are given the chance to play Tekken 2, it will have graced Japanese store shelves for nearly a year. Having said that, is it worth upward of $100 to get this game earlier?

Q. *Hey, I love your mag! Anyway, I was just wondering what the situation between Square and Nintendo is right now? I heard that they were talking again about publishing games for the N64. I thought they were working for Sony now? Please clarify this for me.*

Sam
SammyBlade@aol.com

A. Square is not "working" for Sony, per se, rather they are developing projects for the platform. Much speculation has been made about the possibility of development for the Nintendo64. It is believed that after Nintendo demonstrates a successful launch of the "64DD" media device, Square will hop on board and support Nintendo as they always have done in the past.

Q. *What's up with you guys? You claim to be a game magazine, but as far as I'm concerned you're full of it. You guys always cover 2-D games like Legend of Oasis and give them glowing reviews because of "hand-drawn art" and "multiple layers of parallax." Your reviewers must be blind. I've had many game systems and I find the CD-i is a great system because there's no pretentious 2-D garbage. It's full of glorious FMV sequences and super movie scenes with real-life people. I'll stick to reading my [magazine name removed] because they know that 3-D rules and 2-D is dead.*

C. Allen
Hardy, MD

A. Yeah, whatever.

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Last-Minute Update!

Nintendo drops the U.S. price of the N64; Sonic X-Treme plans are suspended

Just before we went to press, the announcement was made that Nintendo of America would now be releasing the Nintendo64 system this fall for $199.95, instead of the original planned price of $249.95. Additionally, the launch date for the system was pushed back one day to Sept. 29, which is a Sunday, to prevent hungry gamers from skipping school (and work!) in order to get their hands on an N64 and the two launch titles (yes, now there are only two—Mario and PilotWings, with WaveRace 64 following soon after in mid-October). According to Nintendo, over 900,000 Nintendo64 units have already been sold in Japan (as of Aug. 19), and sales projections for the system have actually gone up, despite word that system sales have slacked off in Japan because of the lack of new software available. Now Nintendo is saying that they plan to sell over five million units within the first nine months of the system's availability.

Price Reduced

On Hold

Definitely strong words from Nintendo, but does that mean that any of this is impossible? Certainly not. New games are being announced almost weekly now in Japan, and the fabulous Super Mario64 should keep gamers more than busy until the new wave of software hits around Christmas time. Let's not forget that the Super NES went through a similar launch in the U.S., only to go on to sell millions upon millions of systems over its long lifespan of over five years.

In other last-minute news, Sega of America has just announced that Sonic X-Treme has been put on indefinite hold, and instead, a 32-Bit version of the Genesis Sonic title, Sonic Blast, will be released for the Saturn in November.

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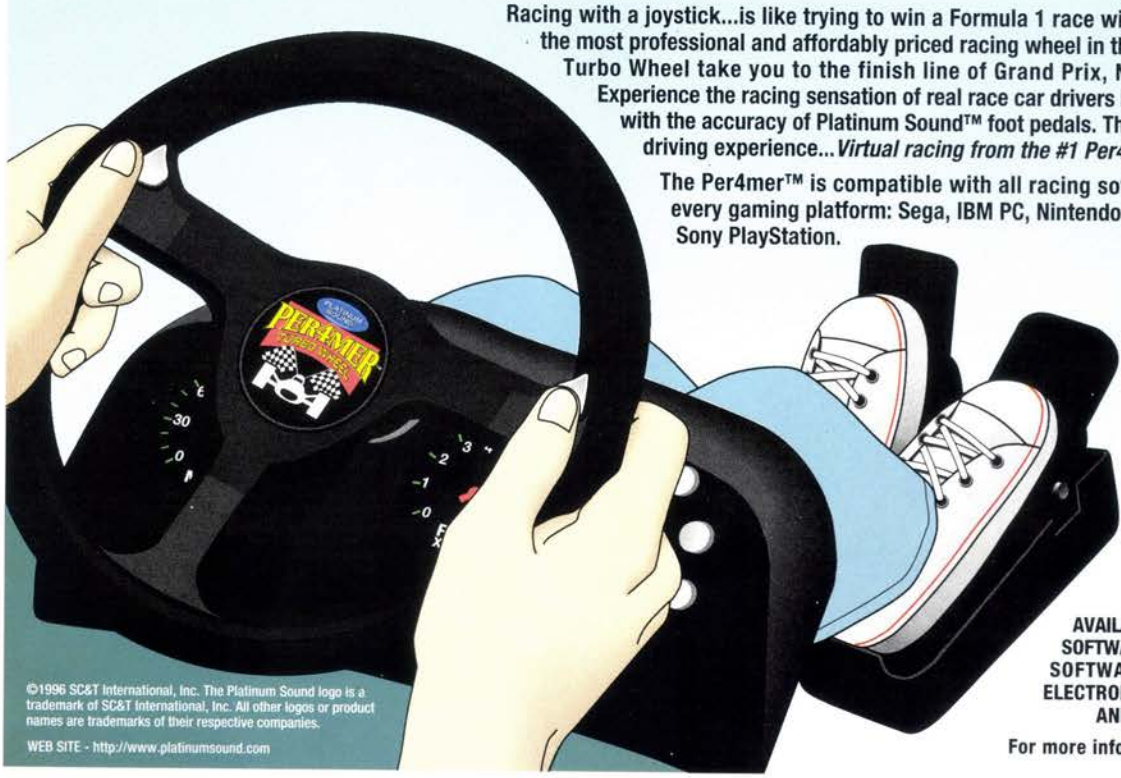

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