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Microsoft's XBox: The Next Step
in European Console Gaming

by [Nils Tanner](#)

A few days ago, Europe saw the introduction of Microsoft's XBox. As in the rest of the world, the product seemed to lack some of the inherent marketable qualities of its two competitors, Sony's Playstation 2 and Nintendo's Gamecube. Whereas the Playstation 2 enjoyed an enormous anticipation due to the large customer base of its predecessor and Nintendo still is a household name amongst most European families, Microsoft does not have a reputation among console gamers. However, Microsoft is trying to make up for this by means of an enormous marketing budget, thus creating a new situation in the European market.

Prior to the launch of the next-gen consoles in the United States, media coverage rose to a high even over here. A lot could be heard about preordering offers, bundles, queues forming in front of stores and even people camping on the pavement the night before. Although things were even more exaggerated in Japan, America always seemed to see a similarly high amount of extensive marketing. I remember reading articles about the launches of the Sega Genesis and the Super Nintendo. Being a teenager at that time and already an avid gamer, I read as much as I could about the launch events. And of course, I never saw something similar to it, as the situation over here is quite different. Obviously, the launch of a new console will be anticipated in gaming mags and nowadays on the Internet. But when walking into a store, one usually doesn't see anything about a new console until the day it is actually launched. There are some exceptions to this, of course. When the Nintendo 64 was launched, there was a preordering offer by Nintendo. You had to pay 64 Swiss francs (or German marks in Germany and so on...) in order to reserve your unit, and you'd pay the rest later on. However, although dedicated gaming stores were offering this deal, department stores didn't really pick up this idea. When the Gameboy Advance launched on June 22nd last year, next to nothing was seen about the product in department stores beforehand. It was possible to reserve your copy in special shops, but that's about it. However, with the advent of the XBox, it seems that Europe is getting closer to the American market in terms of marketing of a new console. Obviously, you'd get some information about the launch in gaming mags and your bigger games store, so no surprise there. But then something happened which has been totally unheard of in Europe's gaming history: Every single department store I visited (and I went to quite a few different ones just to make sure that my point is valid) was offering some special preorder deal for the XBox. There's one store I particularly like to visit in order to take a look at the range of games they're offering. First of all, that particular shops treats games as toys for kids and not as a piece of electronic entertainment. Furthermore, it is amazing how uninformed the staff are. Ask them a question about a game or a gaming system, and you'll get an answer which simply makes you laugh because it is so ridiculously wrong. Imagine my surprise when I walked into that store and saw a huge advertising board for the XBox. I couldn't believe my eyes, so I thought I'd ask the staff about that new "electronic thing", anticipating that they'd tell me a bunch of silly things as they usually do. Well, they didn't: Everything they said was based on facts, though obviously looked at through the eyes of a person who got the information directly from Microsoft (well, I assume it would be the same with Sony or every other company, so no offence meant). So apparently, the marketing not only consists of a preordering scheme and advertisements, but it is extended to other domains as well! Although I won't buy the console right now, as it doesn't appeal to my gaming taste, I am actually quite happy about this extensive marketing. It shows that finally, both producers and retailers are taking videogaming in Europe serious. As the market still is bigger in America (and thus you guys get more games...), I hope that this "Americanisation" of the marketing might be a step into the right direction.

Thus, Microsoft may very well have changed the face of gaming in Europe. Nevermind the actual product they are trying to sell, their approach to the market is not necessarily a new one, but certainly a very strong one. In May we'll see whether this trend is going to continue or not: The launch of the Gamecube is getting closer...

PlayStation 2 Review:

Mr. Do! 2K2 – Do!’s Great Adventure

by [Alan Hewston](#)

I thought I’d quickly review the Playstation 2 game Mr. Do! 2K2 while it is still new, and before my editor does – sorry Tom this game is just so cool I had to “Do” it. Squaresoft provides us with a major upgrade to the old Universal arcade game Mr. Do! - which is contained within. I was just browsing through Best Buy last week and boy am I glad that I was as I grabbed up their last copy on sale for \$34.99.

This new game plays exactly like the classic, but with loads more added. You still have the monsters come out of their generator; you can fire one shot - wait for the reload cycle and then fire again; both Mr. Do! and the super versions of the monsters can remove dirt from the screen; collect all the cherries; the prize shows up over the monster generator - which will set the Alpha-monster and his gang in motion.; Apples are there to drop on the bad guys which can sometimes - but rarely turn into a diamond; and finally you can of course - spell out EXTRA for an extra life. But now, the programmers added many of our favorite Joystick era and Bit Age era gaming elements - enough that I’d have gladly paid \$50 for it – well I guess if I knew all this in advance I would.

The game starts off very easy for several rooms, gradually building up the challenge and adding in variety. You can enjoy the levels at an easier pace, or if you locate the hidden warps you can quickly get to the higher levels. The biggest difference is that now it is more like an adventure game. Instead of each screen or room being unrelated, now you must exit the room through a door (or a warp) and then immediately continue playing in the adjacent room you’ve entered. But most or all of the doors are closed or sealed. If all the cherries are consumed, you still have to make it out of an exit door as well, but the monsters cannot follow you. If you clear the room by either shooting all the bad guys, picking up the diamond, or spelling out EXTRA, then the monsters are nullified/dead and you are not in danger from here until your exit. You still want to hurry to get a better bonus. Some of the doors can get blocked by accident too.

Each room has up to 4 exits, one each in the middle of each edge of the screen. You exit each room either L/R/U/D to a room adjacent to it on a 5X5 grid. Sound confusing? Well, at any time during play you can pause to view the map screen - showing all the rooms that you’ve been in and where you can go next etc. Warning: The most important thing is to NOT get cornered in on the maze and then not be able to exit into another room. If you have no place to go, you lose a life (exception see ** below). I’ve done this on purpose and after you lose your life, you begin the next life in a room with doors closest to where you died. This could lead to a double death, so be careful. You see, once you exit a room, all of its doors become sealed forever, thus there is no back tracking. So, make sure to view the map from time to time and think about where you are headed next. To complete an entire level, you must either complete (exit from) all 25 (26) rooms, or at least 22 (**) rooms - with no adjoining room to enter. You get a larger bonus if you complete a level by exiting out the top row to the surface.

Level 2 and up (I’ve only made it to level 4 without warping) are nearly the same layout for the map and layout for each room, but with more and varied obstacles. There are more cherries in some rooms, more bad guys, two generators, different location of generators, walls that cannot break, and you can accidentally block your exit with an apple or a pear. Yes, some Apples in later levels are replaced with Pears, that when freed move left/right instead of down. Thus the side exits can also get blocked by accident. But there are also neat things like hidden bonus lives, Warps to higher levels, Golden Apples, and some Apples that are hidden until touched. Touching an Apple reveals if it is a Golden Apple and then all enemies are destroyed. There are actually 26 rooms per level when you count the first room, which is above the ground, and also the location of Mr. Do!’s house. It’s just above the middle room of the top row. In the first level you cannot do anything there except exit down into room below. But in the subsequent levels, you can choose which power-up skill to use (see below), you also find a girlfriend, get married, have kids, pets and more - all part of this adventure. Definitely try warping as soon as you can and/or skipping quickly past levels to see all these characters in action, plus the neat animation/demo when they join you.

Some of the rooms have exits that are always open, randomly open/close, or can be triggered. So look for them if you need to make an early exit. The left, right and bottom edges of the 5X5 grid do not have exits out from the grid. The top row does allow you to exit through to the top, but then this will end the level. This makes a best way (besides Warps) to proceed quickly to the next level. Each level is unique and so there are many different patterns to choose (what path to go through every room). And, yes, you will want to complete every room, since there is one Golden Apple (power-up) found randomly on each level, but only after you complete 20 rooms. Actually two are easily seen on the first level, but only one thereafter, and usually harder to find.

Power Ups - The Golden Apples collected are shown on the screen but you don’t get the next power-up skill until you visit Mr. Do’s house again - and cash it in. You must keep finding the Golden Apples (up to 10) in order to use all the power-up skills. In order to gain the power-up skill for that level, you must have collected enough Golden Apples: 2 for level 2, 3 for L3, 4 for L4, 5 for L5, 6 for L6, 7 for L7 or L8, 8 for L9 or L10, 9 for L11 or L12, and finally 10 for levels 13 and up. So if you miss one, don’t despair, you can still find one per level and eventually have power-up skills the entire game. When in Mr. Do’s House, you decide if you want the special skill for that level, or the standard/default skill of “extra shot” (also has a reload time). The even numbered level you only get to use “extra shot”. On the odd levels you get to choose any skill from that level or below: Level 3) extra speed (hold down the skill button); L5) invulnerability (last 5 seconds, resets in 25 seconds); L7) land mines (drop 5 per room goes off upon contact by a monster) – this sounds cool; L9) Apple peels (monsters slowed by finite trail of peels); L11) Torches (locate the cherries/apples in the dark – 3 per room); L13) the Big Apple (obliterates everything in its path and creates an exit – 10 per level). There are a few more but let’s not spoil your appetite. It is suggested that you use the specific skill for that odd level, but can choose any of the skills from earlier levels. When you lose a life you can change to a different skill for that life/level. Each level gets harder and the rooms near the bottom of each level are the hardest. The location of the generator(s) is sometimes close to the entrance you just came in – so look out. There are solid walls that cannot be broken, invisible solid walls, and dark rooms.

The GRAPHICS are pretty good with a lot of color, yet simple like the original so that you can easily ID the characters and baddies. The SOUND is pretty neat with much of the old musical score still there, plus several new sound effects that are really helpful. I enjoy games that challenge your auditory skills – ie give you audio warnings either alone, or in addition to graphical warnings. The CONTROLS are easy to use and not too complicated. The REPLAYABILITY is great, because there can be so many strategies and possible ways to play. The GAMEPLAY is

wonderful with many elements, but not so many that you cannot get the hang of the game and enjoy the strategy / skill combo that this games provides.

The Characters: A friend joins you at level 2 and you get an upgrade every 4 levels thereafter: Miss Do!, who later becomes Mrs. Do!, then your son - Little Do!, and your daughter - Little Doette! (yes a bad pun -see below), finally your pets Dino! (where'd they steal that one from), and Donut! Miss Do! and the subsequent characters join you at Mr. Do!'s House and follow along behind you, ala Yoshi until they die or are upgraded. Miss Do! joins you at level 2 as another line of defense. If touched, she is stopped along with that bad guy and cannot join you until the next room. She must be set free (shoot that bad guy) or else you lose her forever. Likewise don't drop an Apple on her. Mrs. Do! Comes along on level 6, and does what Miss Do! did, plus after 30 seconds she'll unfreeze (but the monster will not) and make a beeline to your side. Little Do! does what Miss Do! did, plus Eats cherries along with you and will eventually drop his load (if you know what I mean) down onto the unsuspecting enemies for big bonus points, just like an Apple. Little Doette! will stop when the enemies touch her and sing - keeping any enemy in range frozen. That's all the further I got so far, but there are a lot more dangers as well. After going back to play some more, I forgot to mention hidden bombs that will explode in 5 seconds, invisible hidden bombs - ouch, and invisible Apples, until touched.

I highly recommend this game, in fact I cannot wait to get back to play it and make it through all 100 levels, but my wait may last an eternity, because this game does not really exist. Dooh! April Fool's - yep, you guessed it. This is an April Fool's joke - or as Tom would call it video game prose. I hope that you made it this far and didn't run out to check bestbuy.com or even call your local store to see if it is in stock. Heh heh. Since I'm writing the Many Faces of Mr. Do! in the April issue of the Retrogaming Times, I started thinking about what improvements could be added to the old game, and why not tell a tall tale as if they were incorporated. This sure was fun, and I probably won't do this again - until next April's issue. Maybe we'll look at 3-D Space Taxi.

(Alan Hewston, now a member of the BAT editorial staff, who probably could have been a famous game designer/programmer/play tester for Activision if he were 20 years older, can be reached at hewston9@stratos.net. Be sure to say hello to him (dressed as Pitfall Harry) at the PhillyClassics3 and CCAG2002.)

The Six Month Report Card

To anyone who is not scoring at home, we are past the six month mark since the three new video game systems have been released in the United States. With this anniversary, it is time to take a look at the race to end all races.

First Place - Sony Playstation 2

Leading by a huge margin (over 25 million sold worldwide), it shows no sign of slowing. Despite being the oldest and the most technically inferior of the machines, the Playstation 2 offers something that the others cannot, lots of great games. Every genre is covered by at least one AAA title and some genres have more than one. With even more games coming as well as a very real price cut (word is the price will be going down to \$199.99 at E3, but it is just a rumor now).

The big moment for the Sony Playstation 2 that really cemented its dominance was over the holiday season of 2001. With the two new systems, many people expected the sales to wane for the PS2, but it did the opposite as sales erupted and it sold a ton. Thanks in part to limited numbers of X-Boxes and Gamecubes and even more to a solid lineup of such hits as Grand Theft Auto 3, Metal Gear Solid 2, Final Fantasy X and Jak and Daxter. While many people expected the sales of the Playstation 2 to level off or go down with the new systems arriving, it did the opposite and sales took off. The big lead that the Playstation 2 had, just widened over the holidays and now looks insurmountable.

Second Place - Nintendo Gamecube

Sales have been less than expected for the veteran of the video game wars. The Gamecube came out with lukewarm sales in Japan as the launch lineup of games was very weak. When it came the USA, it had a better batch of games, despite having a true console mover. But as the holidays went on, Super Smash Brothers Melee came out and sales of the Gamecube started to heat up. Add in the very enjoyable Pikmin to the popular Star Wars, Super Monkey Ball and Luigi's Mansion and you have a decent library of titles. Overall world sales are around 4 million units.

As one looks at the Gamecube launch lineup of games and the games that are out for the first six months, one thought comes to mind, the system was rushed out. Not to say the system is not ready to be released, but it did not have the killer software that we expected with a Nintendo launch. not a single must have title for the system, though there are some very good titles, most of which were mentioned in the previous paragraph. But with no Mario, Zelda, Donkey Kong or Pokemon title until at least the holidays, sales appear to remain decent at best. If there is one phrase that best describes Nintendo and its consoles, it is that people buy Nintendo systems for Nintendo games. Sure, having the Resident Evil games exclusive to the Gamecube is a nice feature and Sega is making some very nice games for the system (Super Monkey Ball and Sonic being two) and have more on the horizon with the Phantasy Star leading the pack, but it is the Nintendo games that will make or break the system. Until Mario or Zelda comes out, we will not know the true fate of the Gamecube.

Third Place - Microsoft X-Box

The X-Box started off with some great sales in the USA and had a very nice launch lineup of games. With systems sellers in the form of Halo, Dead or Alive 3 and a choice of either Madden, NFL 2K2 or the surprise hit, NFL Fever, the X-Box delivered some great games. The hard drive has been a great addition and having built in online connectivity is a nice bonus. But the big sales in the USA have not continued in Japan or Europe. Outside of the USA, the X-Box is withering on the vine and it looks like it may have to make it in the USA alone. This is quite a feat for any system to do, as Japan is a very important market, not only for sales, but also because the majority of the game companies reside there. Without strong support from Japan, the X-Box has its work cut out for it. It currently has about 3 million units sold worldwide.

While the launch lineup was strong, there hasn't been too many must have titles since then. Highly touted games like Wreckless, Circus Maximus and Azurik did not exactly live up to the hype. Not that the system hasn't had some very good games for it, Jet Set Radio Future being one of them, but it just did not have anymore system sellers like the launch titles. But there is some hope on the horizon as there are some very nice titles coming to the X-Box.

Sega is providing Shenmue 2 and World Series Baseball 2K3, both exclusives. There is also two highly touted RPGs, Morrowind, coming out any day now and Project Ego, which will not be out until next year, but has the making of a system seller. With Halo 2 in the works and some other very unique titles headed over, the X-Box may be able to get a strong foothold in the USA. It may have to concede Japan and concentrate on the other two markets, something that Sega should have done with the Dreamcast. It also needs to get its online games going and in a hurry.

X-Box, is it the Dreamcast all over again?

With six months behind the X-Box, it is looking more and more like the Sega Dreamcast all over again. While Microsoft has alot more money than Sega had and was not saddled with enormous debt, there are enough similarities to make a person go hmmm... While it is still early for the X-Box and it can avoid the fate of the Dreamcast, it is making many of the same mistakes. Take a look and see if you agree.

1. No Online Play-Both the X-Box and the Dreamcast came with a built in modem (I know the X-Box is an ethernet card, but the principle is the same). Both were released with no online games. Here we are six months later and still no sign of the Microsoft having online games. While you can make the excuse that online play was new for Sega and it took it some time to build the network, you cannot make the same excuses for Microsoft. They have run their MSN online service provider for about 5 years and have made their fair share of online games, including Asheron's Call, so they have the experience and the people who can do it. There is no reason for them to not have online play at this point in the race. It is a huge blunder and one that should result in some serious firings at Redmond. Like the Dreamcast, this was a big selling point and one that is being wasted. Every day the X-Box stays offline, is one day closer to the Playstation 2 having their network up and running.

2. Where is the third party support?-There was alot of great titles for the launch, but many of the third party companies seem to have a wait and see approach to future titles. If you take away Sega, most of the Japanese companies seem to limit their support for the X-Box. Just like the Dreamcast that had alot of initial support, but soon saw it evaporate after the launch. The big problem is that Microsoft does not have the developers that Sega had to keep a steady stream of great titles coming out to keep the system afloat a little longer. Plus, too many hit games come out on other systems first. Games like Tony Hawk's 3, Onimusha and whenever Metal Gear comes out.

3. Weak Support in Japan-Just like the Dreamcast, the X-Box has not done well in Japan. Granted, it is still early, but this is not a good sign. Very few systems survive by only doing well in one region. The Genesis did this with US support and not alot of Japanese support as well as the Turbo Grafx doing very well in Japan, but not very good in the USA, but they are exceptions to the rule and not the norm. You really need to do well in both to really have a fighting chance. Besides the sales, you need the support of the game developers and many of them are in Japan. Namco, Konami, Square, Tecmo, Sega, Koei and Enix are but a few of the many companies that are Japanese based. Without companies like this, you lose out on a majority of the most popular genres, including fighters, shooters and RPGs, of which carry the most loyal fans. Sure there is the Electronic Arts, Activisions and Infogrames, but many of the system sellers come from the Japanese companies, including Metal Gear Solid 2, Final Fantasy X and Virtua Fighter 4.

While it is too early to pull the plug on the X-Box, the similarities are there. Microsoft needs to reevaluate its position and possibly write off Japan. The online gaming needs to hit soon and it needs to hit hard. They need to launch it with more than one measly game, like Sega did. They need to make online games for everyone, including some simple ones like cards, board games and stuff that non gamers would enjoy. They also need a few more AAA titles, especially in the crucial RPG and fighting categories, where they are sorely lacking. But with Microsoft's money and experience, they should at least give it a good fight and last longer than the year and a half that the Dreamcast lasted.

More Collectible Bit Age Games

A few issues ago, I wrote about some Dreamcast games that I thought would be good investments, for the investing type. I have been overwhelmed with emails from people who want to know about more games or have ones they wanted to add to the list. So here is a follow-up to that article.

There are already quite a few collectible games out there. Some are well known, like Chronotrigger for the Super Nintendo (can fetch as much as \$200.00 for a complete one) and Dragonball GT for the Sony Playstation (must be the US version, it also fetches as much as \$200.00). But what about the not so known titles? Here are a few for you:

- Aerowings 2 for the Sega Dreamcast. (\$40.00)
- Marvel vs Capcom 2 for the Sega Dreamcast (\$40.00)
- Tokyo Xtreme Racer 2 for the Sega Dreamcast (\$40.00-\$50.00)
- Dead or Alive 2 for Sega Dreamcast (\$35.00-\$40.00)
- Gallop Racer for the Playstation (\$30.00-\$40.00)
- Ogre Battle for the Playstation (\$30.00)
- Bubble Bobble for the Playstation (with Rainbow Islands) (\$40.00-\$50.00)
- Starcraft for the Nintendo 64 (\$50.00-\$60.00)

Want a Challenge?

Looking for a collecting challenge? Then try to get all the boxes for the Nintendo 8-Bit games. Sure, you can get the carts, that is tough. But it is nowhere near as tough as getting all the boxes. For some reason, Nintendo boxes were thrown out at a rapid rate. Don't believe me? Go to your local used game store and see how many loose Nintendo games they have. Then look at the boxed games. Notice the difference?

Now is a very good time to get these boxes. For the most part, you can get them pretty cheap and boxed games don't fetch too much more than the loose games, except for the more popular games. You can get the majority of the Nintendo boxes right now and not have your bank account emptied.

This will change in the coming years as the demand for Nintendo games increases (and trust me, it is increasing). Soon, boxed games will fetch double, triple even quadruple what a loose cart sells for. Many people are realizing that these boxes are little works of art and are collecting them for display as much as collecting them.

Aim and Shoot

A new genre came out of the Bit Age, the light gun games. Sure, there were gun games before the Bit Age, but they were few and far between. But once the Bit Age started, that all changed. A handful of very popular games came out that brought the light gun games to the forefront and it became a legitimate genre.

Probably the most popular of the light gun games was the pack-in game with the Nintendo, Duck Hunt. Most people got their first taste of light guns while hunting ducks and wishing they could shoot the dog. It was a basic, but fun game and still an enjoyable diversion.

The Nintendo also featured other light gun games. Wild Outlaw and Gotcha were two others, but neither one had the impact that Duck Hunt had. Alot was due to the fact that neither one came with the system.

Another very popular light gun game was Lethal Enforcers for the Sega Genesis. This game, made by Treasure, was one of the most enjoyable and best remembered light gun games. People to this day, talk about how much they loved this game.

At the arcades, there were a handful of popular light gun games. Operation Wolf was among the most popular. This lead to many others, including Beast Busters, Aliens and eventually Virtua Cop and House of the Dead, both great gun games from Sega. Soon you had two player cooperative games as well as some variations on the theme (Ocean Hunter had you fighting underwater, Jurassic Park had to riding in a jeep and shooting and Silent Scope had you playing thee role of a sniper.

To this day, light gun games are a popular part of the arcade and at home. Funny to think that the genre really took off with the player shooting at ducks and getting taunted by a cartoon dog.

Conclusion

This is a very short issue, but at least it is out. The past few months have been very hectic for me. I have played very little of my beloved Dreamcast and Playstation 2. Heck, I still have Giants: Citizen Kabuto still in the shrinkwrap and I picked it up over a week ago at the Phillyclassic. Look for the next issue, in a month or so, to be much bigger. Now it is time to get some sleep.

[-Tired Tom Zjaba](#)