

ON SCREEN



Battle of the Titans

Billions of dollars are at stake in a game of strategy, genius and luck



CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON: THE SONY PLAYSTATION OR NINTENDO

It's more than just a game

WHAT'S HOT PlayStation

■ Sony's PlayStation is this week releasing *Crash Bandicoot: Warped*, which finds Crash swimming on the lost continent of Atlantis, riding on the back of a young T-Rex and time-warping to a futuristic world in the new millennium. Overall, the franchise — *Crash Bandicoot* and *Crash Bandicoot 2* — has sold more than five million units.

Other recent PlayStation releases expected to do well this season include:

- *Contender*, a head-to-head boxing game that allows you to knock out your friend.
- *MediEvil*, a combination of sword-play, puzzles, explorations and dark humour.
- *Cool Boarders 3*, providing the look and feel of real snowboarding action.
- *NHL: FaceOff '99*, with textured faces on the NHL players.
- *Spyro the Dragon*, where players glide, fly, roll, jump and frolic through more than 30 interactive fantasy worlds.

— Photo illustrations: Rob Alary

BY ROY GREEN
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If you don't know the difference between *Crash Bandicoot* and *Banjo-Kazooie*, just ask your kids.

Crash and B-J, and others with names such as Mario, Sonic the Hedgehog, *Zelda*, *Lara Croft* and *Spyro the Dragon* are now key players in an industry worth \$15 billion a year — home video games.

And the heart of that industry remains the electronic consoles manufactured by Sony, Nintendo and Sega.

Though it all began in 1977 with Pong, Atari's strange bouncing cursor, Nintendo and Sega have long dominated the market — until Sony came along three years ago with its PlayStation.

Backed by a long list of new software titles and a hefty marketing budget, Sony's PlayStation grabbed the overwhelming share of the market in Japan, Europe and North America, extending its lead over the Nintendo 64 machine in the first quarter of this year," reads an article in the *Financial Times*.

"Sony games group worldwide generated more than \$5.47 billion in fiscal 1998, making it the best-selling product in Sony Corp's 50-

Electronic might is not child's play for the makers of elaborate video games

year history," said Kaz Hirai, CEO of Sony Computer Entertainment.

It's a volatile industry, witness the fact that in February of 1997, Nintendo had 50 per cent of the \$500-million Canadian market; Sega had 30 per cent and Sony was at 20 per cent.

As early as last January, Peter MacDougall, general manager of Nintendo of Canada, was trumpeting the company's 1997 performance.

"With sales of \$200 million, Nintendo of Canada has captured 68 per cent of the total video game industry in Canada," he said.

But that was then.

Sony's Hirai says one of the reasons for the company's success is that, unlike its rivals, Sony built one hardware product — the

PlayStation — that supports more than 400 titles.

Nintendo markets Nintendo 64, Super Nintendo and the hand-held Game Boy units.

But, having said that, Sony is nevertheless prepared to expand on that idea. Next spring, the company will introduce its Personal Digital Assistant, a unit that extends the power and versatility of the console.

The unit can be played separately, apart from the console, including outdoors. It also allows users to exchange data between two PDAs directly, without using the console as a bridge.

But in an industry known for its changing leaders, Nintendo and Sega are not about to throw in the towel.

Nintendo has spent more than \$100 million since the summer promoting its hardware and games, including the eagerly awaited *Zelda: Ocarina of Time*.

Nintendo says it expects to sell two million units of the game following the Nov. 23 North American launch.

They're also releasing a new

See BATTLE LINES, page 27.

WHAT'S HOT Nintendo

Nintendo's holiday lineup includes Game Boy Colour, with six new titles.

■ *Game Boy digital camera and printer*, a cartridge that fits in the palm of your hand. The swivelling, big-eye lens and camera, when used with the printer, allows users to photograph and insert their own faces as stars of games.

■ *Pokemon*, currently the biggest game in Japan. How big is this? Well, it has its own animated TV show and multitude of products.

■ *The Legend of Zelda: The Ocarina of Time*. In development for the past four years, Nintendo says this is the biggest software title it has ever launched.

■ *Banjo-Kazooie* — Banjo, a male honey bear and his partner Kazooie, a female, red-crested breegull, travel through vast worlds filled with a variety of challenging tasks.

■ *Turok 2*, the sequel to last year's monster hit featuring dinosaur-hunting action for up to four players.

■ *Star Wars: Rogue Squadron*. Developed by LucasArts, it's a flight simulation shooter game.

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