

64DD: The next step

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Japan is holding its breath for it. Nintendo is banking on it. And here at N64 Magazine we can't wait to get our hands on it. At Space World, however, we could only peer longingly through a pane of glass at it.

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NINTENDO 64



64DD

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△ It could've been ours. But James forgot to bring the glass-cutter.

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The 64DD, which was only visible behind glass at Space World, appears to have mutated into something rather different to the straight disk drive add-

on Nintendo originally revealed at last year's show. It's not the hardware that's changed so much as the type of software Nintendo are creating for it.

When Nintendo originally exhibited the 64DD at last year's show, it was simply meant to provide an alternative way of getting games into your N64. Carts are fast and reliable, but 64DD disks would handle bigger games and be cheaper to produce. And a demonstration of *Super Mario 64* running off a disk rather than a cart seemed to back this up, along with talk of add-on disks for cart games.

But the twelve months since then have caused Nintendo to do a lot of serious thinking. Their traditional audience in Japan has moved on from the cheery world of Mario and his pals. The PlayStation now dominates the market for 'conventional' games, and few people seem interested in even the greatest N64 titles like *Starfox 64* and *GoldenEye 007*. And yet, Nintendo are still making enormous profits in Japan. How come?

The answer is *Pocket Monsters*, a Game Boy game that has both kept interest in Nintendo's eight-year-old handheld alive, and, along with Bandai's Tamagotchi, created a completely new market from scratch. Nintendo have cleverly seized upon *Pocket Monsters* and, through a

marketing and merchandising blitz, have turned it into the most successful game in Japanese history, outstripping sales of even *Super Mario Bros. 3*.

Pocket Monsters isn't a 'game' in the traditional sense, however. It's sort of a cross between a Tamagotchi 'virtual pet' and an RPG, allowing you to nurture a monster and then fight battles with him against your friend. And it appeals to a quite different audience to ordinary Nintendo games - a younger audience, of girls as much as boys. And it's this audience that Nintendo is now going to try to woo to the N64 using the 64DD.

Most obviously, *Pocket Monsters Stadium* is a blatant attempt to persuade *Pocket Monsters* players to buy N64s and 64DDs. It includes a special Controller



△ The hardware is certainly a giant leap forward for the Nintendo 64...

...but the software - so far at least - is, erm, a bit weird.





◀ It might not look like much yet, but with some Picture Maker textures stuck onto it...

The N64's new mouse will be vital for the 'multi-media' ideas Nintendo are playing about with.

◀ Design your very own tower blocks, and then live in them, sort of.



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△ That could be your face being mapped onto a 3D bloke...
...if you were to make use of the new N64 Capture Cassette and a camcorder



pack that allows players to download monsters from their Game Boy carts and fight battles using the N64's 3D graphics, and should be irresistible to anyone who's spent ages building up their monster but has only ever seen it in black-and-white. *Pocket Monsters Snap* and *Pikachu Genki Dechu* (a cart game) also take advantage of the Japanese tendency to completism.

And the only other 64DD software to be displayed at Space World was the *Maker* trilogy – *Talent Maker*, *Picture Maker* and *Polygon Maker*. While these disks have nothing to do with *Pocket Monsters*, they are trying to tap into exactly the same Japanese desire to be 'creative'. And with the special video digitiser cartridge Nintendo are producing to accompany them, they'll be able to do things that simply haven't been possible with a games console before.

Compatibility between different software packages also seems to be a 64DD goal for Nintendo. The *Maker* disks all

allow you to use blank disks to swap data, loading pictures you've drawn in *Picture Maker* into *Talent Maker*, and objects from *Polygon Maker* into *Picture Maker*. And you'll be able to build cities in *Sim City 64* and then fly around them in *Sim Copter*.

Nintendo see themselves very much as the visionaries of the video games industry, initiating the next trend while others are still trying to catch up with the last. And they really do seem to believe that, in Japan at least, the future lies in 'creativity software' rather than just straight games. You're not happy, are you? Go on – admit it. And, to be honest, we're not exactly enamoured by Nintendo's new ideas either. We want bigger and better games from the 64DD, not *Mario Paint* all over again.

But, luckily, it looks like Nintendo won't be deserting their gaming fans just yet. Miyamoto, the driving force behind Nintendo, has already announced that Nintendo are working on a special 64DD version of *F-Zero X* that uses disks to add extra tracks and allows you to design your own circuits (maybe using textures you've drawn in *Picture Maker*?). There are still plans for a 64DD version of *Zelda*, although it seems these aren't as advanced as was previously thought. And plenty of third-party developers have plans for the 64DD, taking advantage of its capacity and economy to design games they couldn't have done on cart.

And, of course, Nintendo remain committed to making brilliant new cartridge games, as they've proved by stunning everyone with *Zelda* at Space World and producing surprises like *1080° Snowboarding*.

So look at the 64DD software on these pages and think not of weird yellow creatures and bonkers karaoke software but of the power that lies behind them, and imagine what it'll make possible in the Nintendo games of the future.

WHAT IS THE 64DD?

The specifications of the 64DD were finalised some time ago, but the Space World show helped to set its capabilities in stone.

What does it do?

It's an add-on for the N64 that sits underneath the console and allows it to access high-capacity discs. These discs hold 64 Megabytes of data each (that's eight times the size of a Super Mario 64 cart).

What's on the disks?

Anything, really – a game, some extra levels for a game, some updated stats for a game, a track you've designed for *F-Zero X*, a picture you've drawn with *Picture Maker*... anything.

What's the advantage over CDs?

Although 64DD disks are smaller than CDs, half of each disk is writable, so games can save enormous amounts of data onto them. They're also about three times faster than CDs, so "Loading – please wait" messages ought to be infrequent.

What's this about a clock?

The 64DD unit has a real-time clock built into it, like the one in a PC. Nintendo have plans to take advantage of this in games, so you could, for example, find that time still passes in an RPG if you switch it off and come back to it later.

There was talk of a modem...

The 64DD modem appears, unfortunately, not to have materialised, so downloading N64 stuff over the Internet has gone out of the window. Maybe Nintendo will introduce an add-on at a later date, as it seems too good an opportunity to miss.

How much will it cost?

No price has been set for the 64DD yet, but Nintendo are likely to sell it as cheaply as they possibly can – for less than the N64 itself, probably.

When's it out?

The 64DD was going to be out in April in Japan, but it's now been pushed back to June. As for dates elsewhere in the world, well, we'd be surprised to see a European launch for the 64DD before 1999. Er, sorry.

