

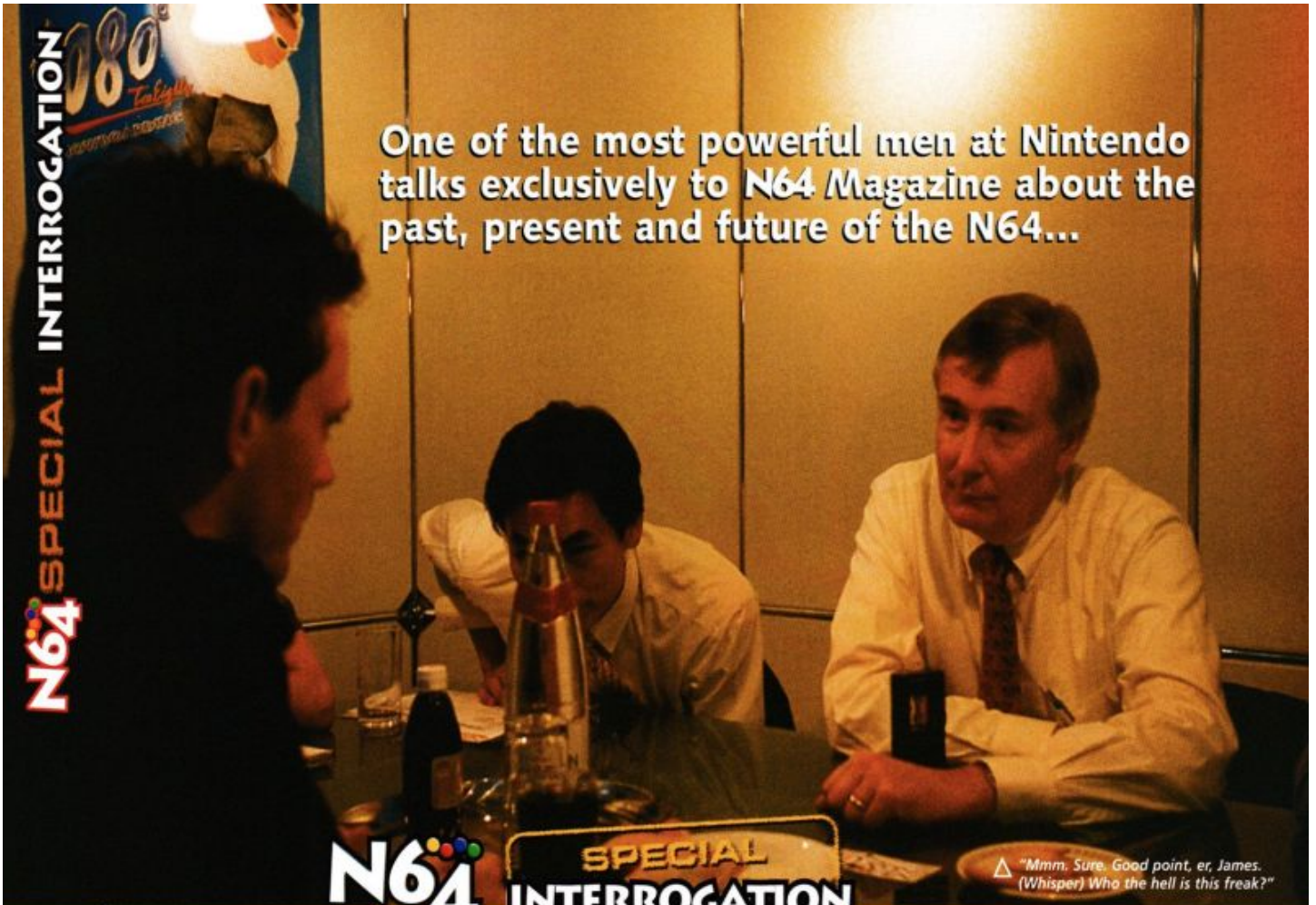
# Howard Lincoln

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One of the most powerful men at Nintendo talks exclusively to N64 Magazine about the past, present and future of the N64...



N64  
MAGAZINE

SPECIAL  
INTERROGATION

△ "Mmm. Sure. Good point, er, James. (Whisper) Who the hell is this freak?"

**JUST WHO THE HELL IS HOWARD LINCOLN?**

Howard Lincoln was born in Oakland, California, during the Second World War. After graduating from university with a degree in law, he served as a military judge, advocate during the Vietnam war. Afterwards he left to join a Seattle law firm on America's West coast.

NCL (Nintendo of Japan) had begun trading in America in 1981 and, when the head of the company Mino Arakawa needed a distribution contract drawing up, he was introduced to Lincoln. However, the lawyer's first important role with Nintendo came when he was involved in trademarking Shigeru Miyamoto's very first game - Donkey Kong. The arcade game enjoyed phenomenal success and the company's profits rocketed. When MCA attempted to sue

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# Howard Lincoln

President of Nintendo of America.



**N64 met up with Howard Lincoln at one of his rare appearances at ECTS (European Computer Trade Show - the largest computer games show in Europe). He took half an hour out from his busy schedule, and we put some of our most pressing questions to one of the most powerful men at Nintendo.**

**N64:** Traditionally, Nintendo have never had a big presence at ECTS. Now, all of a sudden, you've taken one of the largest

**stands at the show and, you yourself, have taken the time and trouble to attend. Why the sudden change in policy?**

**Howard Lincoln:** I think we made a decision early in 1998 that we were going to focus more resources on the European market. We made a series of announcements, put the newly formed Nintendo of Europe in charge of all of our European subsidiaries and had them work with our independent distributors. We also

centralised our third-party publishing program, instead of using NCL.

At a publishing meeting in Rome we announced that one of the ways we were going to demonstrate our commitment to Europe and European gamers was to have a presence at ECTS. I think, if anything, this commitment will strengthen even further in the years to come.



Our presence is just one way of saying that Nintendo are determined to maintain and grow their market share against Sony in 1998, using games such as The Legend of Zelda and Perfect Dark. We think we can do much better and narrow the gap in the years to come.

**N64 Translation:** Nintendo have set up Nintendo Europe to allow games produced over here to be approved for production here in Europe. Before, they had to go to NCL – a costly and time-consuming process. Now that games are easier to publish, we should hopefully see a lot more in development.

**N64:** This is obviously great news for us in the UK. Will it also mean that games are released here at the same time as they are in Japan and America?

I think the gap will close considerably. In some exceptional cases the situation will remain the same – for example, we didn't have time to release 1080° Snowboarding to coincide with the European skiing season so we had to wait until October of this year before releasing it. However, for the majority of releases – for games like Rogue Squadron or Zelda – the games will get a European release at almost exactly the same time as America and Japan.

**N64:** All of us are desperate to get our hands on Zelda 64. Given the amount of time it's been in development, the delays and the sheer amount of hype that it's gathered along the way, do you think it can possibly live up to our expectations?



△ The F-Zero portion of Nintendo's stand sported the very first English translation. Top!

**Lincoln on... THE 64DD**  
**The 64DD will not come to Europe or America in 1998 or 1999. It may come to the Japanese market in the middle of 1999.**

A journalist for the Washington Post put it pretty well after he'd seen the game at a press conference in Redmond (Nintendo's American base in Washington State, near Seattle – Ed). He described Zelda 64 as the "Gone with the Wind of videogames". And that is precisely what we think it is; it's a masterpiece by a master, it represents a tremendous leap in creativity and, when gamers play it, they'll see that it sets a very, very high quality standard for everyone else to compete against.

It's a "Gone with the Wind" game in the sense that people still watch Gone with the Wind now – a film released in 1939. I'm not going to sit here and tell you that people will still be playing Zelda in 60 years' time, but I think it will be a seminal game and one that is deserving of all the hype it has received. If anything, the people who played Zelda at the conference thought that our projected sales figures – we want to sell at least two million copies of the game in the US between November 23rd and December 31st – are too conservative.

It's going to be a great game. And the English language translation is first class.

**N64:** And will it definitely be in the shops in time for Christmas in the UK?

Yes, definitely. We haven't got an official, official date yet, but I have every expectation that it will arrive somewhere in the last week of November or the first week of December.

**N64:** Looking back at the history of the N64 and its launch, with hindsight, do you think that Nintendo could have handled things any better than they did?

Yes and no. 'Yes', to the extent that we could and should have got games development systems out sooner and we should have anticipated that it would be very, very difficult for game developers to make the transition between 2D and 3D. This was made worse by the tremendous leap in quality made by Super Mario, and the enormous distance it required people to make up.

'No', in the sense that both in Europe and the US we did a nice job of launching it. The numbers sold were very impressive.

In the US, for example, we went right past Sony and finished 1997 neck-and-neck with them on a total installed base cumulative for 1997. We were hurt in 1998 by a dearth of top quality games.

We did a good job of launching it, getting it into people's homes but, whatever concerns gamers have or had about the lack of hit N64 titles this year, are going to be eliminated when they see the sheer quantity of brilliant games due out this Christmas and shortly afterwards.

But I'll tell you this as well, one of the reasons that there hasn't been so much software was due to the deliberate decision by Nintendo to hold back games that we could have launched in order to perfect them. This includes games like Banjo-Kazooie. My prediction is that there will be more Rare-developed games on the market in 1999, than in any other year to date. Perfect Dark, Jet Force Gemini, 12 Tales: Conker 64, as well as others including Donkey Kong 64.

**N64 Translation:** Donkey Kong is definitely in production at Rare then. We knew it was but they refused to confirm it. Nintendo still keen on their Quality over Quantity policy. If only we'd remembered to ask them about Cruis'n World/USA.

**N64:** Have Nintendo made the decision to release more development tools to the programming community? Are we going to see games from new developers?

Yes. Those developers who supported the N64 from the start made a huge amount of money. As the installed base grew, all of the third-party publishers saw a more compelling reason to support the platform. We did cut a deal with EA that



△ "If he doesn't get off Zelda in a minute, I'm going to have his liver with a nice Chianti. FFFFFFFF..."

▶ Nintendo over an alleged infringement of the copyright on their film King Kong. Lincoln – together with a New York lawyer John Kirby\* – made a brilliant defence for Nintendo, so good in fact that the MCA ended up having to pay out themselves – a cheque for a cool \$1.8 million.

After his success against MCA, Mino Arakawa asked Lincoln to leave his law practice and come to work for Nintendo full time. The men had become firm friends and Lincoln joined the company as Senior Vice President. Over the years he has become absolutely central to Nintendo's US operation and is now in overall charge of the company's most profitable arm of the business.

\* later had a series of games named after him.

ensures that we will have all of the key EA sports titles on the N64 and now we're seeing good

**Lincoln on... PAL DELAYS**  
**The majority of releases will get a European release at almost exactly the same time as America and Japan.**







△ Link's sword. Ever so useful in the exceptional Legend of Zelda and also pretty handy when Martin goes out on a Saturday night. Yep.

support from other major third party publishers – companies like Acclaim with Turok 2, Infogrames with Mission: Impossible and others. So, I think that if anything, the support from third-party publishers which was tentative at the beginning, is very, very strong right now. Another big reason that third-parties have become more interested, though, is that the N64, as a format, does not suffer

I think third-party publishers have realised that when they do an N64 game, Nintendo are not making a product that can actually counterfeit their games. Third-party publishers aren't idiots and they realise what's going on. They know what's happening on the streets just as we do. And they're seeing Sony on the one hand saying "Come and make a CD-ROM game for the Sony PlayStation" and on the other hand saying "We'll make a CD-ROM copier that copies the software that we're asking other people to take a risk producing". If Nintendo did that, I expect someone would be screaming at us.

**N64 Translation:** Nintendo still despise piracy. Good point about Sony and the CD-ROM format as well.

**N64:** What's going on with the 64DD? Are you releasing it or not?

onto a cart for the same price as a DD disk, why shouldn't they – it's going to save all of us buying an expensive add-on.

The second reason Howie gives is also extremely blunt. Nintendo don't want to con people into buying an N64 add-on that, essentially, they don't need. He's saying if Nintendo can't find a compelling use for the DD, they won't make Sega's Mega CD mistake and release it anyway.

It does look as if Nintendo have lost faith in the 'Maker' series of games they showed at Space World last year. They certainly don't think they're strong enough to launch the DD.

**N64:** We're very excited about Turok 2's use of the 4 Megabyte RAM Expansion Pak, and what the extra memory does for the game's graphics. How do Nintendo

## Lincoln on... THIRD-PARTY PUBLISHERS

**I think that if anything, the support from third-party publishers which was tentative at the beginning, is very, very strong right now.**

The 64DD will not come to Europe or America in 1998 or 1999. It may come to the Japanese market in the middle of 1999. The reasons are very simple.

Firstly, while the memory requirements of the newest N64 games are rising, the cost of the chips that actually make the carts that they're recorded on is falling. No one anticipated this when we were designing the N64 and now, the difference in manufacturing costs between a 64DD disk and an N64 cart has dropped in significance. In terms of memory, there is no compelling reason for the DD – we can simply make bigger cartridges.

Secondly, and most importantly, we haven't yet found a killer piece of software for the DD, either in Europe the US or Japan. Some of the games that are big in Japan lend themselves better to the



△ Rogue Squadron also took a leading role at the show.

## Lincoln on... ZELDA

**I think it will be a seminal game and one that is deserving of all the hype it has received. And the English language translation is absolutely first class.**

the problems Sony does with private piracy. Sony has a software format that can be copied on any street corner with a CD-ROM copier. That is a major problem in Europe and America and it's unique to CD-ROMs. Obviously, there is counterfeiting of N64 cartridges, but you've got to be a pretty sophisticated outfit to do it commercially.

DD but we're not going to foist a piece of hardware onto our consumers unless there is a compelling reason to do so – unlike some of our competitors have done in the past, much to their great regret.

**N64 Translation:** This is honesty for you. The first argument is entirely correct: if Nintendo could fit Zelda

intend to make the Paks available to everyone, and prevent the development of a two-tier N64 market – those gamers with Paks and those without?

We're moving very quickly on this but we haven't as yet reached any firm decisions on how to launch it. We haven't finalised the marketing or how we're going to get the correct message out to gamers but this will all be sorted out within the next 30 days. Suffice to say, we recognise that we



**Lincoln on... RARE**

**Rare have been a very good and very wise investment. We share the same vision of the videogames industry of the future, and the same commitment to quality.**

have to do it as part of the successful launch of the Pak. For one thing, we don't even have a proper name for it. At the moment it's a 4 Megabyte Expansion Pak. Which isn't very catchy.

**N64 Translation:** A hurried launch, then, but from what we've seen of Turok 2 and the RAM Pak, it can't fail.

**N64:** A lot of the games that N64 readers are looking forward to most are coming from Rare – with the exception of Zelda and F-Zero of course. Do you think that Nintendo are relying too much on the one company?

No. We've made a significant financial investment in Rare and they've produced a series of blockbuster games. We've also made investments in other third-party developers – some of which are public such as Left Field in the US, and some of which we have not revealed for various reasons. And, in Redmond, we've formed an N64 technology company who are also going to be creating games.

This doesn't mean we're hedging our bets, or reflect in any way on our relationship with Rare, which is very positive. We just want lots of creative talent in lots of places.

I have to say though, Rare have been a very good and very wise investment and they're a great company to work with. We share the same vision of the videogames industry of the future, and the same commitment to quality.

On the other hand, I don't think there are many companies that would've been as patient and understanding as Nintendo were when Rare said "I'm sorry the game simply isn't ready yet". That's what happened with Banjo and GoldenEye but we gave them time and look what we eventually got out of it.

**N64:** You've spoken already about the advantages cartridges have over CDs when it comes to piracy. When it comes to programming, though, are you still happy that developers can fit brilliant games onto a cartridge?

Oh yes. Absolutely. We haven't made a decision on what the software medium for our next generation console will be. We can't say yet whether it will be cartridge or not. What I can tell you is that we will spend a lot of time, money and effort making sure that there will be no private piracy of our games. I'm not sure that we

can afford to hire the professional commercial counterfeiters that the Chinese government use to help us, but that is a possibility. Whatever the medium is, though, we're not going to allow it to be copied on any street corner.

**N64 Translation:** Nintendo are convinced enough about carts to consider using them in their next console, then.

**Lincoln on... RAM EXPANSION**

**We're moving very quickly on this but we haven't reached any firm decisions on how to launch it. We don't even have a proper name for it – 4 Megabyte Expansion Pak isn't very catchy.**

**N64:** While the N64 has lots of brilliant games, it's notable that apart from the ones supplied by NCL themselves, none have come from the big Japanese developers. What do you think Nintendo can do to persuade giants such as Capcom, Square, Namco and the like to support the N64?

I think ultimately, whether in Japan or anywhere else, publishers will support platforms that have a growing installation base. I think that we will gradually see companies, like those you mention, lending their support to the N64.

In Japan, Nintendo have noted the Pokemon phenomenon and are attempting to build on the situation with games like Pokemon Stadium. The idea is, once we can increase the size of the installed base of N64s in Japan, other publishers will start to support the system.

The fact is, third-party publishers do not produce games for a console unless that console is viable and growing. I don't care what they (the publishers) say, or what Bernie Stollar (Head of Sega US – Ed) says they say. I know, for a fact, that this is the case.

Our job in any market is to get that market to grow and Pokemon Stadium is doing that very nicely in Japan right now.

**N64 Translation:** Pocket Monsters is essential to Nintendo. If they can show Capcom etc. how much money there is in N64 games, then these Japanese third parties will hopefully hop on board – bringing with them games like Resident Evil and Final Fantasy.

**N64:** Are Nintendo worried about the appearance of Sega's Dreamcast system? Do N64 owners have anything to fear?

I wouldn't call it a serious threat. Sega are a major player in the videogames industry but I would only regard the Dreamcast itself as a threat once it has an installed base. And this is only going to happen when we see whether or not Sega are capable of making first class, hardware-selling software, without relying on

anybody else. If they can do that, they have a chance. If they can't, they don't.

**N64:** What are your favourite games at the moment?

Nintendo's slightly more-impressive presence at this year's ECTS show.



I'm not an avid gamesplayer, but I'm continuing to play Tetris and I've fallen in love with the Colour Game Boy. On the N64, I loved GoldenEye, but my favourite was Super Mario 64. It introduced me to the analogue stick, and for the first time I actually felt like I was in proper control of what I was doing in a platform game.

