

The Nintendo 64 Strikes back!

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The Nintendo 64 Strikes Back!

Nintendo has been taking knocks for a somewhat sparse lineup of games for the Nintendo 64 and the delayed release of its much-vaunted N64 peripheral, the 64DD disk drive. But Nintendo Company Limited in Japan is staying true to its "quality, not quantity" mantra: It's firing back with solid games for 1998.

Yoshi to the Rescue

The game paving the way for Nintendo's N64 titles in Japan is Yoshi's Story (see ProReview this issue). Yoshi's shows how a 2D action/adventure game can make a 3D system fly.



Yoshi's Story features 2D side-scrolling action.

Link Lives!

Of course, the N64 game drawing the most attention is the Legend of Zelda, a title that isn't about to disappoint the fans. Zelda 64 will star Link in an

all-new adventure set in a huge 3D world.

But more than just the environment is going to be different in Zelda. The controls—especially the analog joystick—will take a little getting used to, but anyone familiar with Super Mario 64 will soon be exploring Link's new setting. And this time Link won't have to make his treks just on foot: He can also ride a horse! Link rides and runs about with ease while the camera tracks his motion seamlessly in 3D.

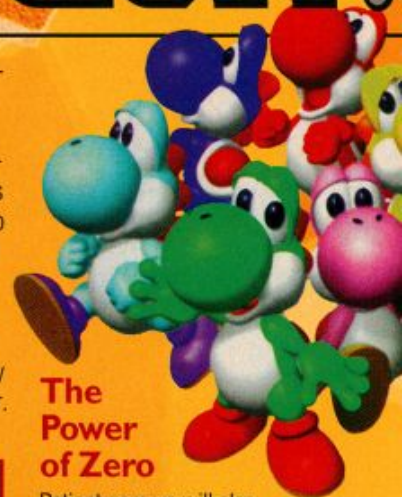
Fans of past Zelda games will take comfort in the familiar weapons and items, but much of Link's gear has been modified. For example, flinging the boomerang in 3D is especially impressive, as it zooms off into the distance and

then returns to you (a totally different experience from the top-down Zeldas of yore).

Although it's sure to be another masterpiece by Nintendo's games master, Shigeru Miyamoto (see interview "Inside the Mind of Shigeru Miyamoto" that follows), don't rush to the stores just yet—the Japanese version has been delayed and Zelda may not reach America until summer.



U.S. gamers may have to wait a little longer for Zelda 64.



The Power of Zero

Patient gamers will also be treated to another Miyamoto favorite. The time is nearly here for the next installment of one of the best Super Famicom (Super NES in the U.S.) racing games ever—F-Zero! Nintendo is gearing up to release F-Zero X in the first half of 1998.

F-Zero could be a knockout. The first few courses are done, and the game has more racers, vehicles, and options than ever. There are eight main characters and over 20 vehicles to choose from. You'll be able to customize vehicles by changing acceleration,



F-Zero X is revving up for a spring '98 release.

speed, and handling characteristics. The courses are laid out with numerous slopes and



In Japan, Nintendo is getting ready to pull out the big N64 games. Here's a report by GamePro's man in Japan, along with an interview with Nintendo's own game guru, Shigeru Miyamoto.

By Ken Ogasawara

valleys, as well as plenty of sharp banks and high-speed turns. As in Diddy Kong Racing, competing racers crowd F-Zero's screen. It will be worth the wait to play an F-Zero game this polished.

Let It Snow

The sleeper hit of the year may be 1080, which looks like it's going to be a primo snowboarding game. Once again, the N64 controller will really shine here. The characters will not only respond instantly to each shift of the analog joystick, but they'll lean further according to how steeply you tilt the stick.

Another nuance that will make this game shine is the snow. Slicing through deep powder makes it much harder to turn and keep your speed consistent, while packed snow enables you to fly across the slopes but forces you to take wider turns. If you wipe out and lose your balance, you can plow through some very deep snowbanks.

Nintendo hopes that 1080 will prove there's no business like snow business.



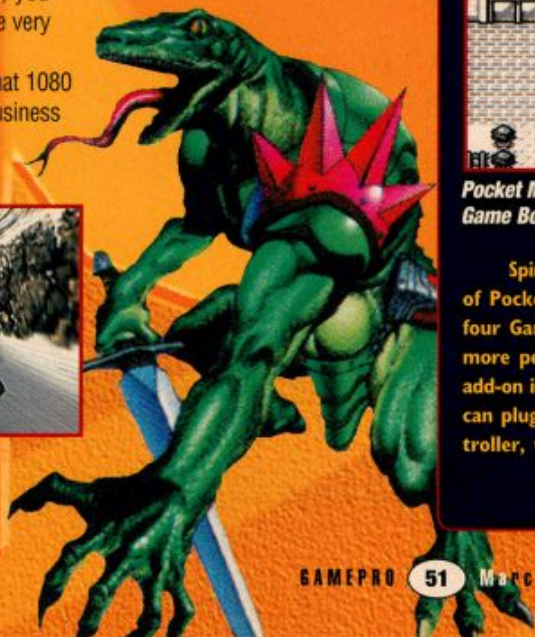
Nintendo's ready for the slopes with 1080.

Roll Out the Role-Playing

RPG fans can finally take heart: Super Mario RPG 64 and Mother 3 (Earthbound 64) are in development and will likely come to light in Japan and the U.S. this year. Mother 3 will make its debut with the 64DD in June.

Wanted: Quality and Quantity

Hopefully, Nintendo's strong N64 carts and the upcoming 64DD will prime the pumps for more games from third-party developers this year. Quality is nice when there's enough quantity to support all genres and all gamers.



THE POCKET MONSTER: It's Alive!

The N64 also has a monster lurking in its Japanese pocket. Pocket Monster for the Game Boy is a wildly popular game in Japan that's coming to the N64. This may have little to do with American gamers right now, but it's guaranteed to strengthen the N64's popularity with Japanese gamers and game publishers alike.

Those unfamiliar with Pocket Monster won't be for long since a U.S. version is on deck, but basically it's a game where you battle other friends (via the GameLink) with monsters you've created. If you win, you keep your friend's monster. Pocket Monsters are the single reason that the Game Boy is still selling well in Japan. Even though it was released only a little over a year ago, it's already one of the best-selling games of all time, with units continuing to sell briskly by the week. The soon-to-be-released Pocket Monster Gold and Silver versions will introduce new adventures and new monsters to the current 151 varieties.



Pocket Monster is haunting the Game Boy.

Spin-offs from the success of Pocket Monsters include four Game Boy games and more peripherals. One such add-on is an adapter that you can plug into your N64 controller, which allows you to

connect a Game Boy cartridge to the N64. Although it won't allow you to play GB games on the N64, it will allow you to use the stored data from a GB game with certain N64 titles. This is especially important for Pocket Monsters since one of the key elements of the game is trading monsters that you have captured from other people. A game directly utilizing this system will be Pocket Monster Stadium for the N64, where you can have



Pocket Monsters battle it out on the N64.

your monsters battle it out with other monsters.

Another N64 peripheral will be a voice-command unit that will be used with Pikachu Genkidechu, which can be considered a virtual-pet simulator for the Nintendo 64. With voice commands, however, the player can become even more involved in the action. Currently, the game is set up to recognize over 80 commands, all of the single-word variety. Other N64 games are sure to use this technology soon.



Another virtual-pet sim for the N64—Pikachu Genkidechu

THE NINTENDO 64 STRIKES BACK!

Inside the Mind of Shigeru Miyamoto

GamePro: Can you tell us what projects you're currently working on?

Shigeru Miyamoto: Well, there are four main titles: The Legend of Zelda, F-Zero X, 1080, and Mario Artist. There are also other projects that I am looking at, but not actually working on. I'm also following the development of additional peripherals for the N64.

GP: Such as...?

SM: An adapter that will allow you to plug a Game Boy cartridge into an N64 controller-pack slot. It's being developed so that players can trade monsters with the N64 version of Pocket Monsters.

GP: That doesn't mean that you actually play the game on the N64, does it? You just trade the data, correct?

SM: That's correct, but in the future we will certainly make games where that data will be utilized. For example, currently in development is Pocket Monster Stadium, where monsters that players have developed on the Game Boy can fight against each other. In this arrangement, up to four players can trade monsters at the same time.

GP: What do you think of the current Pocket Monster craze?

SM: It is causing a headache. (laughs) It keeps the N64 from selling. (laughs) Pokémon (Pocket Monsters) is selling too much.

GP: Getting back to the main N64 games that you're involved with, when can we expect to see them on store shelves?

SM: Ahh...right now we're worried about the order in which we should release them. We plan to bring out 1080 first—while there is still snow. Probably February in Japan.



1080 features head-to-head split-screen action.

GP: Where did the snowboarding idea come from?

SM: Oh, that came about because I like skiing. I was thinking about making a skiing game after completing WaveRace. However, the current trend seems to be toward snowboarding.

With snowboarding, it seems that you can go places that you can't with skis; for example, in between trees. It seems like

GamePro had a rare opportunity to interview Shigeru Miyamoto, Nintendo's legendary leading creative mind. With the Mario, StarFox, and Zelda series among his credits, Miyamoto is naturally bullish on the Nintendo 64.

more of an adventure. Also, since I am a skier, I wanted to make sure that the game really made it feel like you were sliding across snow, and I also wanted to reproduce the effects of various types of snow. In 1080 you'll experience snow that is harder or softer and deeper in places.

GP: What happened to Zelda? Nintendo seemed to still be claiming that it would be out at year's end.

SM: Well...Yoshi's Story was delayed, sliding from the summer slot into the winter sales slot. Due to that, we put all our power behind finishing that title for the holidays. So Zelda was pushed back, probably to spring, but no promises since we have to undergo thorough bug testing and balancing, and we're not sure how long that will take yet. If I state an actual release date, the media will jump on me again. (laughs)

GP: Well, as gamers, we want to play this game NOW.

SM: Yes, of course (laughs), but we plan to get the game out during spring before the weather starts to get hot, provided that there are no major catastrophes. After that, we'll probably launch F-Zero X.

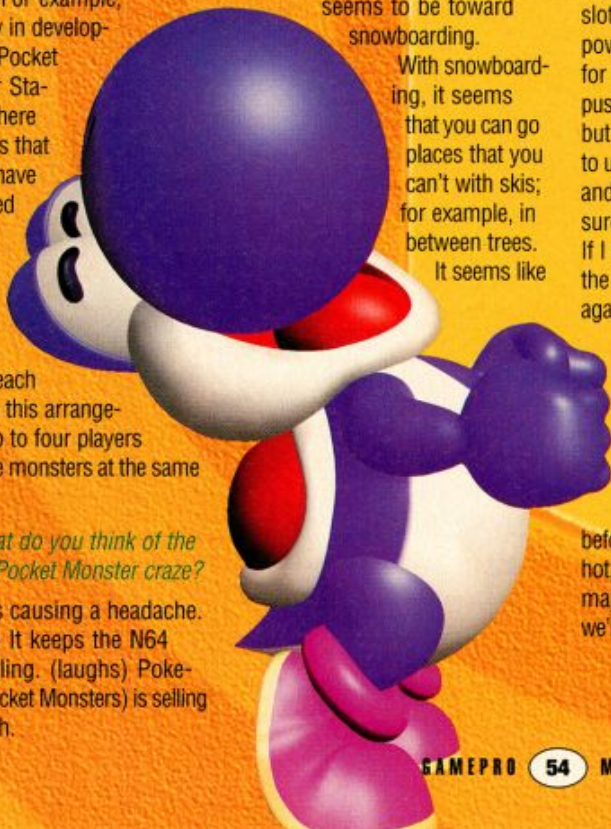
GP: So how close is Zelda to completion?

SM: The system itself is almost done—about 90–95 percent. The data part, the number of monsters, the puzzles, and so forth, that's what we are currently working hard on. After that, we do game balancing and the last big hurdle, bug testing. With many hours of gameplay involved, we want to make sure there are no logic bugs, so this process will take months to do.

GP: Will gamers who have played the 16-bit version be able to look forward to the same weapons? Or even more?

SM: Certainly. All the old weapons will be there, but the enjoyment from using them will be different since you're in a completely new viewpoint. For example, the boomerang really looks cool and the long sword looks great. I don't know what fighting-game purists will think of Zelda, but it seems to make normal players feel that they have gotten good at an action game.

What I worry about the most is the difficulty: Is it too hard? I think that maybe it's okay for it to be a bit on the difficult side for the people who play action games, but I want to make it an easier action game to play than Mario. My feeling is that even though people enjoy games, the number of really good players is on the decline. I





want to make sure that players enjoy the game and that it has various challenges for all.

GP: Rumor has it that there are also three 64DD titles almost complete.

SM: Mario Artist and Pocket Monsters...actually, Mario Artist is a series of three N64 carts that will let you create many types of graphic images, including 3D polygon imagery and animation for the N64.

GP: Will gamers enjoy that?

SM: I don't know. However, if they do, the N64 will be the only system that they can use to do that. Nintendo wants to make games that are not available on any other hardware. Most companies make stuff that copies something that's already selling. Nintendo has tried to make things first, to be the market leader. Even if it doesn't work, we will move on to try to create

another first. That is one of our strategies.

Also, my vision of the ideal gamer is someone who is creative. I think someone is having the most fun when they're being creative. For example, when people play Mario, the part of them that feels the fun comes from the creative side. When creative software is accepted as games, I think we'll have reached another level in video game entertainment. However, these projects will require a storage device like the DD.



Mario Artist will be a trilogy on the N64.

GP: Will you create your own elements in the DD version of Zelda?

SM: The 64DD version of Zelda will simply have additional places to explore. It's not the story that makes Zelda interesting, but the game system. The biggest difference between Zelda and an RPG is that in an RPG, the system stays the same while a new story template is placed on it. However, in the case of Zelda, the template changes how you play the game. That is one of the things that can be done with the DD.

GP: Okay, what happened to Kirby's Air Ride?

SM: So many things have been added to Kirby's Air Ride that it has become something that is not the original Air Ride. We have stopped that project to put our efforts into the snowboarding game.

We are still making the game, but it has gone beyond just the air ride. The people responsible for making the game complained that they didn't want to make a game where Kirby just slid around. They're really putting a lot of games in Kirby, so it is not Kirby's Air Ride anymore, but something more. (laughs)

GP: With many of the genres finally getting a few games, it would be nice to see a really good fighting game.

SM: Yes, that's true. If we had the manpower, it's possible we would do that, but right now we must depend upon other developers. For example, Namco should make a fighting game for the system. Maybe they will. (laughs) But how about Killer Instinct Gold?

GP: That game and another fighting game haven't gotten a warm reception from fighting-game fans.

SM: Hmm, maybe I should seriously consider making one... However, making a game takes

a lot of effort. We would not be able to make a top-level fighting game right away.

GP: But only if you would come out and set the standard for all the other developers to reach. You have been the man that all designers have been striving to emulate.

SM: Thank you. I just try to produce games that have an impact on kids when they first play them and, from then on, continue to provide enjoyment every time they are played. However, I just don't think that fighting games are the genre to do that.

We certainly were the first to make that type of game with Urban Champ and Punch Out, so Nintendo does have some expertise in the fighting department. However, I feel that I was beaten to the punch when Virtua Fighter came out, since I was fooling around with polygons at the time. I thought that was one of the ideal ways to create a fighting game.

My pride at that point wouldn't allow me to bring out something that would have been seen as a copy. If we had continued at that point, maybe now....

GP: Final question then: Where do you see Nintendo's place in the video game industry?

SM: Well, Nintendo is a company that makes and sells games to make a profit, so we feel that we should continue to make the market expand rather than shrink. Our company president certainly feels that should be policy. To do that, there may be times that we have to take a loss when we make a new product without following the pack...to create projects that will alleviate some of the problems in the industry. To try to keep breaking new ground... (laughs)...A bit pretentious perhaps, but we think we have that sort of responsibility. ■