

All you want for Christmas

Article scanné dans le magazine Electronic Gaming Monthly n°101 (Décembre 1997)

Sujet de l'article : Nintendo 64

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All You Want For Christmas

The Ultimate Guide To The Hottest Gifts

The year's most-wanted games are finally hitting stores. We're being bombarded by prime-time and Saturday-morning video game commercials. And the issues of *EGM* are once again swelling in size.

Yep, it's beginning to look a lot like Christmas.

And chances are you have more than a few games, gadgets—heck, even systems—on your wish list. Lucky for you, this holiday season won't be as confusing and chaotic as last year. The three big consoles have pretty much found their niches, and no new systems (well, except the Game.Com) are looming on the horizon to steal their thunder.

At the same time, however, there are simply too many incredible games out there for the consoles. We're seeing killer third-generation software for the PlayStation and Saturn and second-generation titles for the Nintendo 64 (not to mention a heck of a lot more games for the troubled console). It's like Christmas 1993—when the 16-Bit systems were in their prime—all over again.

So you have a lot of decisions to make this year. Which games are the season's must-haves? Which are the best of each genre? Which peripherals would make a kick-ass gift for your buddy/sibling/self? And which system best suits your tastes in gaming?

In what's becoming an annual tradition for *EGM*, we're answering all these questions with a special holiday gift guide. We explain each system's strengths and weaknesses. We tell you which titles are the best if you like fighting games, racing games, strategy games, etc. We highlight the ultimate peripherals—from fighting sticks to light guns to some downright bizarre gizmos. And we look ahead to some of the most anticipated games of next year.

To liven up the feature, a few of the Review Crew guys got together and acted out their own version of 'Twas the Night Before Christmas—complete with a very '90s Mrs. Santa Clause. (Actually, the crew just wanted an excuse to hang out with a model and dress in elf costumes.) So grab a pen and your wish list and turn the page. It's time to see what'll make the best stocking fillers come Dec. 25...





'Twas the night before Christmas, and all through the house, not a creature was stirring, except Santa's hot spouse. And with her she brought three



Nintendo⁶⁴

Things Are Looking Up For Nintendo's Capable Console

Nintendo's main machine may not have had the super year we hoped for, but that doesn't mean you should strike it from your Christmas wish list. Next year looks a bit brighter for the system. Yet another crop of way-cool first-party titles are on the way, not the least of which is *Zelda 64*. And like third-party games are going to get

a heck of a lot better (we can't wait to see what Konami has in store for the N64).

Oh, and we can't forget about the DD. Will Nintendo's disk drive be the first pricey add-on in gaming history to succeed? Or will it go the way of the 32X? Either way, the N64 makes a much better gift this year than last.

The N64 at a glance

System's Strengths: Powerful hardware, a library that includes some of the best games available.

System's Weaknesses: Not enough games. Third-party titles are often mediocre and too expensive. Some games are too foggy and blurry.

You need this system if you're into: Action games, multiplayer titles, driving games and updated Super NES classics.

Avoid this system if you're into: RPGs and fighting games.

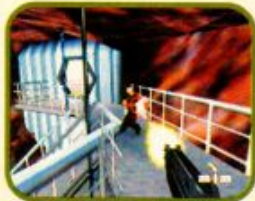
Action: *GoldenEye 007*

Sure, we were a little skeptical when we saw early screen shots of *GoldenEye*. "Oh boy," we thought, "another *Doom* clone." Then we played it. We saw how original and realistic it was. We loved the mission objectives and the huge arsenal of guns and gadgets.

Then someone had the bright idea of trying out the Multiplayer Mode. We've hardly put the game down since. Only *Mario Kart 64* comes close to delivering the same level of four-player thrills.

Don't hesitate to nab this game if you get an N64 for Christmas. And don't forget to buy three more joypads for your pals.

Another must-buy action game is *Blast Corps*, from the same developer, Rare. Part puzzle, part action, *Blast Corps* packs more than 50 levels, enough to keep you bashing buildings well into the new year. Just as innovative is Treasure's *Mischief Makers*, a dazzling side-scrolling platformer that's loaded with the wildest Bosses on the N64. Fans of *Doom* clones shouldn't pass up *Turok: Dinosaur Hunter*, *Duke Nukem 64*, *Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire* and—of course—*Doom 64*.



Nintendo Controller

There are plenty of third-party controllers to choose from, but you're still best off buying Nintendo's own pad, which so far seems the most comfortable and durable. Extra controllers are a must, too. How else are you going to play four-player *GoldenEye 007*, *Mario Kart 64* and *Diddy Kong Racing*?



Bulky Drive

This add-on's still a long way off, but it's definitely the next big thing for the N64. Due to hit Japan in March and late summer/fall in the U.S., we expect the Nintendo disk drive not to cost any more than the system itself. The first disk games include *Earthbound 64*, *Mario Artist* (a *Mario Paint*-type title) and a version of *SimCity*. Nintendo has also confirmed that the DD will have a built-in modem, which could allow players to download game updates and other goodies.



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scruffy little elves. "Terrific," she said. "They'll do all the work themselves." But the tiny helpers had ideas of their own. They wanted to haul all that



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Puzzle: Tetrisphere

The N64's only puzzle game to date is both cool and complicated. But once you invest the few hours it takes to learn its nuances, Tetrisphere is as addictive as the best puzzlers on the competing system (well, except maybe the Super NES Tetris Attack). What makes the game really stand out are its loads of play variations; you get everything from the standard puzzles to a funky Rescue Mode. And, of course, it's a blast for two players.

Another game worth getting (although, to be honest, it's not really a puzzle title) is Bomberman 64, which packs just enough puzzle elements to satisfy fans of the genre. This, the most unusual Bomberman game to date, offers a huge Exploration Mode as well as the traditional multiplayer madness.



Fighting: Killer Instinct Gold

Although the N64 has yet to see a stand-out fighting game along the lines of Tekken 2, Fighters Megamix or Street Fighter Ex Plus Alpha, there are a few halfway-decent brawlers. Despite the fancy 3-D graphics in Mace: The Dark Age and Dark Rift, the best of the bunch remains Killer Instinct Gold, which delivers a better-than-perfect port of the arcade's KI2.

Mortal Kombat Trilogy is worth a look, too. We're hoping next year will bring a better batch, although the outlook so far isn't promising.



Rumble Pak

We were a little skeptical about this humming gizmo until the first time we plugged it into Star Fox 64 and felt it buzz in tune with the afterburner. Yes, a vibrating joystick really does add something to a game. And for titles like GoldenEye—in which your pad rocks with each blast from your shotgun—the Pak helps complete the experience.

Nintendo's Rumble Pak is definitely

worth picking up as a pack-in with Star Fox 64 or by itself for less than \$20.



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GameShark

Chances are you've beaten all your N64 games several times. Breathe new life into them with the InterAct's GameShark. It lets you access hidden characters and weapons as well as max out your health and ammo. In other words, the GameShark lets you cheat like crazy. It also packs a user-friendly interface with plenty of built-in codes. Just choose the one you want to play, or program your own. It can hold thousands of codes.



gaming gear home. Mrs. Claus wasn't about to take any crap. "Now, now boys," she said, "put the N64 back!" Elf Crispin shouted, "No way, boss,



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Sports: International Superstar Soccer 64

No matter what sport you're into—or even if you don't like sports at all—ISS 64 is an insanely fun game that offers the right mix of arcade action and realism. The graphics are incredible, especially the player animations (some post-goal celebrations are downright hilarious). It supports up to four players, as well.



If realism is more your thing, you can't go wrong with Madden 64. It may not have the NFL licenses, but it does have well-animated 3-D players and the smartest AI jocks around.



Shooter: Star Fox 64

The pickins might be pretty slim for N64 owners who crave shooters, but what's there is phenomenal. Star Fox 64 is the best 3-D shooter to hit the consoles (although Ace Combat 2 for the PlayStation comes close). It doles out relentless action (some levels are crammed with so many enemies they look like the climactic battle Best of Independence Day), and the branching mission paths and secret areas pump up the game's replay value. Best of all, Star Fox 64 drops you into three vehicles—the standard Arwing, a jump jet-equipped tank and a submarine armed with unlimited torpedoes. Few shooters are this intense.



Controller Pak

Sure, you can get by without a memory cartridge with most N64 games. But—as we learned with Turok—you're gonna need one to save games sooner or later. Although you can nab lots of dirt-cheap carts from third parties (some of which are loaded with extra memory) Nintendo's own Controller Paks are the most reliable.



V3 Racing Wheel

Now that the N64 is getting some racing games based in the real world (instead of in the fantasy lands of Mario and Diddy Kong characters), you might want to get a steering wheel that's more at home in the real world, too. InterAct's V3 Racing Wheel features 300 degrees of wheel rotation, adjustable tilt and analog foot pedals. It's also built with flaps that you can sit on to keep the rig from sliding off your lap.



that sucks. An N64 costs 150 bucks!" Then Elf Shoe and Elf Shawn joined in the fight. "Hooh boy," thought Mrs. Claus, "It's gonna be a long night."



Nintendo⁶⁴

Racing: Diddy Kong Racing

Mario Kart 64 used to be the reigning racing champ on the N64, at least until Nintendo unveiled the surprise title Diddy Kong Racing. Its mix of racing action and Super Mario 64 exploration—not to mention its air, sea and land vehicles—make it the most innovative racer ever, while its more than 20 tracks and huge assortment of race variations make it endlessly playable.

Besides Mario Kart 64, other must-buy racers include Nintendo's Wave Race 64, and Acclaim's decidedly WipeOut-like Extreme G. Top Gear Rally is definitely worth a look, too. But you already knew that if you've read this month's reviews.



A look ahead...

It's a given that you'll grab Zelda 64 when it hits in the spring and Yoshi's Story in February, but don't forget about F-Zero 64, also due in the spring. This update to the Super NES classic lets you race on nearly 20 courses against 40 opponents, and it reportedly displays all these racers on screen without dropping below 60 frames per second!

Third-party N64 developers are kicking into high gear, too. Konami will release Mystical Ninja 64 and Castlevania 3D (working title), and rumor has

it they're also working on an N64 Metal Gear game. Expect to see a Tomb Raider title from Eidos next year, as well as Turok 2 from Acclaim and Quake from Midway.

Then there are the DD games, among them Earthbound 64, the first RPG for the system. And it has been rumored that Super Mario 64 2 will be ready for the DD's U.S. launch in late summer, but that release date is not in stone. SM64 2 is one game Nintendo won't release until they're good and ready.

Arcade Shark

Let's face it—for most N64 fighting games, the regular joypad sucks. The camera buttons are just too small and too close together for your fat fingers to pull off massive combos.

InterAct's Arcade Shark solves these problems with its conventional button layout and removable arcade-style ball joystick.



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For the gamer who has everything... The Gold N64 Controller

OK, so it's not really made of solid gold, but this fancy joypad will still make you look like Mr. Bigshot to fellow gamers. Until recently, there was only one way to get your hands on this rare peripheral—you had to win one in the Star Fox tournament at E³. But now it comes as a pack-in in specially marked N64 system boxes at Toys 'R' Us.

