

# Betting On a Better-Built Bulky

Article scanné dans le magazine Electronic Gaming Monthly n°102 (Janvier 1998)

Sujet de l'article : Nintendo 64DD Starter Pak

*Un article sur le 64DD*

Scans réalisés par les membres du site Nintendo64EVER, usage exclusivement destiné aux autres membres du site. Toute reproduction, partielle ou complète, ainsi que la diffusion de ce fichier est interdite. Les magazines originaux sont la propriété intellectuelle exclusive de leurs éditeurs respectifs, les scans regroupés dans ce fichier ont un but uniquement documentatif et informatif, aucune exploitation commerciale ne peut en être faite.

# Betting On a Better-Built Bulky

## Concern grows that the introduction of the 64DD will split the Nintendo 64 market in two

If you've followed Nintendo for the past two years, you know that delays often plague their N64 releases. At this time last year, gamers had their fingers crossed that *Zelda 64* would be out before the end of 1997 and hoped that the 64 Disk Drive (64DD) would come and finally put to rest the idea that the N64 would always be cartridge-based. It's 1998 and there's no 64DD under the world's N64 systems. Now, with the cartridge *Zelda 64* not hitting U.S. shelves until mid-1998, the DD seems further away than ever. After delaying the Japanese launch of the 64DD to March 1998, it became apparent that, at least for the time being, cartridges would have to satisfy gamers hungry for N64 games. But with Sony boasting in *Final Fantasy VII* ads that "if this game were available on cartridge, it'd retail for around \$1,200," the 64DD could be the kind of thing Nintendo needs to give developers the space to make bigger games for less money.

With 64 megabytes of space, there's enough room to put a game equal to eight Mario 64's on one DD disk. Or four Banjo-Kazooies. The extra space will give developers more freedom to give games more levels, graphics and sound. Nintendo's chairman Hiroshi Yamauchi has confirmed that the drive will have a modem port so that new levels, characters and stats can be downloaded over the phone, at least in Japan.

However, even with all of its advantages, there's still one hurdle that cannot be overcome easily—the 64DD is an "add-on." Add-ons to video game systems have not done well in the past, splitting the N64 market into two categories: gamers who have the upgrade and those who don't.

"The problem that Nintendo is going to face is the same problem that's faced every hardware manufacturer since Sega's CD drive hit the streets: It's extra," says Shiny Entertainment's David Perry. "Nobody ever wants to pay extra, and by releasing *Zelda* on cart, Nintendo may be shooting itself in the foot, because *Mother 3* isn't going to get Americans rushing out to spend another \$200 on a peripheral—not when all the great games are available as a cart, right now, and for no extra charge."

Originally supposed to be a DD release, *Zelda 64* is on cartridge half the size of the proposed 64DD format. Does this mean that in the near future, carts could get as big as a DD? If it is possible to get 512 Megabits on a cartridge (and the Neo-Geo proved that big carts are possible, if pricey), then releasing the 64DD offers little advantage in terms of increasing the amount of storage

space available to N64 developers. Instead, the DD would have to rely on the selling point of cheaper manufacturing costs, modem capability and writability to keep it viable.

"Modem capability is much overrated, as Sega found to their own cost with the Saturn NetLink. Having said that, if anyone can pull it off, it's the big N, but it's asking consumers to pay a premium for something they really don't, and probably won't ever, need," says Perry.

The biggest advantage, in the eyes of third parties anyway, would be the decreased cost of producing a cartridge versus a DD disk. A 64 megabyte DD would be cheaper than producing a cartridge half that size. That would be more than enough to persuade game companies to jump on the DD bandwagon, but getting consumers to buy into it would have to mean strong software support from the beginning. Judging from the almost full year it has taken third-party companies to get good N64 software to market, the chances that third

parties would be able to support the DD quickly with quality software is low. The 64DD is much more important to Nintendo in Japan than it currently is in the U.S., with *Mother 3* and the latest Pocket Monster incarnation scheduled among the first DD titles to launch with the system.

"Personally, I think the 64DD will not be that good," says

Colin Gordon, of third-party Nintendo 64 developer Boss Game Studios. "We are already considering 128 Megabit cartridges, so Nintendo will be looking at even bigger carts. Unless DD disks are really inexpensive, and can be manufactured here in the U.S., then the disadvantages will outweigh the advantages."

Nintendo hasn't given any information on the peripheral since last spring. At last year's Shoshinkai (now known as Nintendo World) in Japan, the system was little more than a mock-up.

The DD will be officially unveiled at this year's Nintendo World show. But since the standard cartridge configuration has already taken hold of the American market, there's a chance that a DD release will only split Nintendo's previous N64 success. Developers and gamers remain skeptical about the system, but if Nintendo plays its cards right, they could be the first to launch a successful add-on. We'll have more details next issue.

## The Official Word on the 64DD

Here's what we know (officially) about it thus far:

- Uses 3 3/4-inch magnetic disks, which will be front loaded into the drive. Each 64DD disk contains 64 MB of data, eight times that of Super Mario 64.



- The DD utilizes power directly from the N64, so it does not need its own power supply. Comes packaged with a RAM expansion pack, further enhancing the drive's capabilities.
- The writable features of the drive allow players to customize their game, or save game progress directly to disk. Includes an internal, battery-backed realtime clock, so that games could change from day to night or unlock special features in real time.
- Boasts high-speed data access: 1 MB per second Data Transfer Rate. Integrates fonts and audio data capabilities, so that programmers won't have to store this information in the game program itself.
- Allows existing cartridge games to be expanded with new levels, characters and worlds. The cartridge and disk drive can be used simultaneously, allowing developers even more space.
- Will feature network capabilities to "enhance the gameplay experience." Last spring, Nintendo chairman Hiroshi Yamauchi told a Japanese newspaper that the DD will include a modem port, which opens up more possibilities.
- Games such as RPGs, racing and sports titles will benefit from the DD's ability to let players customize game options. Imagine a racing game where you can create tracks; an RPG where you can design the terrain. In development and said to include these features are *SimCity*, *Mother 3* (EarthBound), *Mario Artist* and *Pocket Monsters*.