

E3s are good

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Un article sur l'E3 1997.

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16



E3S Are Good!

A **SWEATY** convention hall in the **MURDER** capital of America, filled with **BLOATY** Yank businessmen, might sound like your idea of **HELL**. But if you had an interest in **N64** games, it was the only **PLACE** to be in July...

E3 IS THE UNDISPUTED heavyweight champion of videogame shows. This year it was held in Atlanta, the city which recently hosted the Olympic games, and is the home of the little-known Coca-Cola corporation. This year over half a million square feet were devoted to the very latest next generation console and PC games, with all of the biggest names in software trying to out-do each other and create the most noise.

This was a crucial time for Nintendo, because of worries about a delay for the 64DD (or whether it will come out at all?) and a general lack of quality games since the launch of the machine worldwide. Yes *Mario 64*, *Pilotwings* and *Mario Kart* all proved to be stunning, but a great many others (*NBA Hangtime*, *Cruis'n USA*, *Hexen*, *Mortal Kombat*) were real stinkers and made a mockery of the big N's commitment to quality. Nintendo owners wanted reassurance that the N64 would pull something special out of the bag to thwart the Sony PlayStation.



Nintendo

The Nintendo stand dominated the show, and this year, as in all previous ones, the company name was emblazoned in ten foot high letters all around the central dome area. The entire area was buzzing with activity, however many of the themed zones contained games which we are now all familiar with even if they haven't yet been released in the UK officially.

There's something incredibly ridiculous about watching 18-stone men climbing aboard a small mock-up of a *Starfox* Arwing, or packing their prodigious, sofa-arsed frames into the seat of a go-kart for a heavy session on *Super Mario Kart*,

but that's what they were doing in their droves. As ever, Nintendo know how to present their products, and unlike Sony, every game booth made you feel as if you were taking part in the action, rather than simply plonking you in front of a plastic case containing a PlayStation and a 28" Trinitron. When you walk onto a Nintendo stand, you instantly become one of the family.

First the bad news. The 64DD has now been delayed until March 1998 in Japan, which sadly means no European launch until at least Christmas, and maybe even a full year later. Howard Lincoln, the CEO of Nintendo America, desperately wanted to downplay the significance of this and concentrate on the software line-up, but many people we talked to at E3 were massively disappointed that there was no new hardware from Nintendo. Lincoln did however say that there would be 40-50 N64 games by Christmas, which is good news in anybody's book. Question is, how many will be *Starfoxes*, and how many will be *Hexens*?





Banjo-Kazooie

Due for a release in November, *Banjo-Kazooie* is a stunning-looking (dare I say it) *Mario 64* clone which takes the gameplay of the Miyamoto classic and adds more character moves and forced situations. Rare of course created the successful *Donkey Kong Country* games and it looks like two in a row, as the cutesy characters in the game are bound to be popular with Nintendo gamers across the globe.



You control Banjo, a honey bear with a Mario-esque repertoire of moves, and your sidekick is of course Kazooie – a red crested Breegull parrot type-thing. Like the classic 8-bit game *Head Over Heels*, the two join together to enable you to fly to other parts of the level, and when not doing the aerial antics, Kazooie is thoughtfully stuffed in Banjo's duffel backpack. Charming.

Banjo-Kazooie is more of the same 3-D free-roaming gameplay introduced in *Mario 64* and although it looks crisp and highly detailed (more textures, intricate characters) the gameplay is worryingly similar and you can't help feeling that perhaps originality is swiftly going out of the window in favour of a tried and tested formula.

Fortunately *Banjo-Kazooie* is very playable and instantly appealing, and the combined characters have 24 different moves, easily beating *Mario 64* and giving you plenty to do. The game has 16 levels and the aim is to find missing golden puzzle pieces in the quest to save Banjo's girlfriend. It's all very familiar, but there is plenty of variety because you can



actually be turned into other creatures if you bad mouth the witch doctors found on each level. This can either severely inhibit you, or actually pave the way to a secret zone which was previously inaccessible. *BK* is a great looking game, but nothing new and many show members were disappointed that the supposed game of the show, was nothing more than *Mario* in new clothes. We have to agree. How many more *Mario* clones must we suffer before the likes of *Zelda* appear?

Two things made Nintendo the talk of the E3 show: Rare and the price of cartridges. But it has to be said that there was a distinct lack of N64 games on the Nintendo stand – many of the really hot titles were simply running on a continuous VHS loop.

Some of the most exciting news at E3 was that at one of the developer conferences Nintendo pledged it would reduce cart prices across the board by 10-20%, and that includes third party developed games such as Acclaim's *Extreme G* and Titus' *Lamborghini 64*. This has been made possible by restructuring the manufacturing process and it certainly breathes some life back into the N64 games scene. Seventy quid is really too much for a console

game. The price cuts should take place immediately in Japan and America, although it may take slightly longer for the effect to filter down to the UK. There is light at the end of the tunnel though.

Rare was without a doubt Nintendo's saving grace this year, with a brace of new and exciting games worth boasting about – at least some developers can be relied upon. First up is *Banjo-Kazooie* (yes I know, an awful name) which was previously called *Dream* (as reported last month) and was expected to be the game of the show. Apparently *Dream* sounded a bit too close to *Nights: Into Dreams* by Sega, and so the goofy new moniker was thought up. Doh!



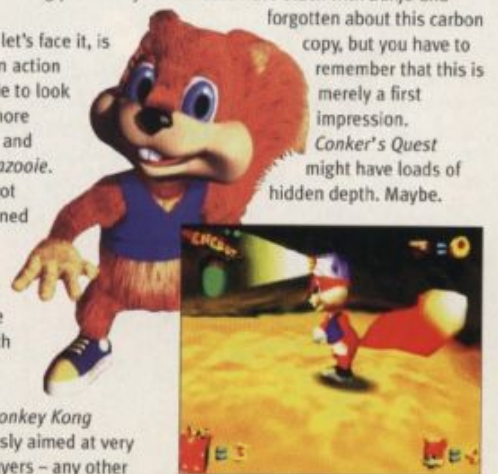
Conker's Quest

Rare's second secret project was... you guessed it, another 3-D adventure, only this time featuring a hyperactive squirrel instead of a honey bear. The differences end there though. Same violent green grass. Same wall textures, and the little guy even does a bottom bounce. In fact *Conker's Quest* looks like a 64-bit version of Ocean's platform game on the Super NES, *Mr Nutz*, with the two central characters looking practically identical.

Conker's Quest, let's face it, is a desperate cartoon action game which is made to look redundant by the more visually impressive and innovative *Banjo-Kazooie*. Once again we've got Conkers himself joined by a 'loveable' sidekick (this time, a chipmunk called Berri – does anyone care?) complete with 'amusing' facial expressions. The gameplay is pure *Donkey Kong Country* and obviously aimed at very young Nintendo players – any other



sane person will be insulted this cynical marketing exercise. Rare should have stuck with *Banjo* and forgotten about this carbon copy, but you have to remember that this is merely a first impression. *Conker's Quest* might have loads of hidden depth. Maybe.





Goldeneye

Yes! Yes! Yes! This is more like it. Thankfully, for its premier N64 game, Rare has abandoned brightly coloured cartoon mascots and produced a film tie-in of unequalled quality. *Goldeneye* was without a doubt the Nintendo game of the show and for the first time we could see the majesty of the full screen mode, and also play both two and four player split screen deathmatches.

Words can hardly describe the feeling of whipping all those smug American videogames journalists on their home turf, especially as I could play Bond and they were consigned to being the duelling-scarred henchmen. This is a



game to get saving for.

Goldeneye will be the first of the Rare games to hit the shelves (August in America) and looks to be the most fun for adult gamers. Ask anyone at the Atlanta convention centre what they thought Nintendo's ace card was, and "*Goldeneye*" was the unanimous reply. Not only is it graphically far better than *Turok*, but there are 18 huge levels, lifelike polygon enemies, digitised faces, and an excellent arsenal of real life weapons and gadgets. Only *Mission: Impossible* comes close in the 'must have' stakes. *Goldeneye* is also compatible with the Rumble Pak which adds to the realism and as Nintendo put it "ensures that the James Bond experience is shaken, not stirred."



One excellent new feature is the ability to press one of the shoulder buttons on the pad and bring up a zoom in view, complete with sniper's cross-hair. This is perfect in the one and multi-player modes, for hiding from the enemy and then picking them off one by one from a great distance. A clever touch and one that is a definite improvement over *Turok*.

Goldeneye will be featured more heavily in a future issue of 64 MAGAZINE and looks to be one of the N64's best games, especially as Ocean was not even showing *Mission: Impossible* at the show, the reason rumoured to be because *Goldeneye* was far better than anyone had predicted.

Major League Baseball

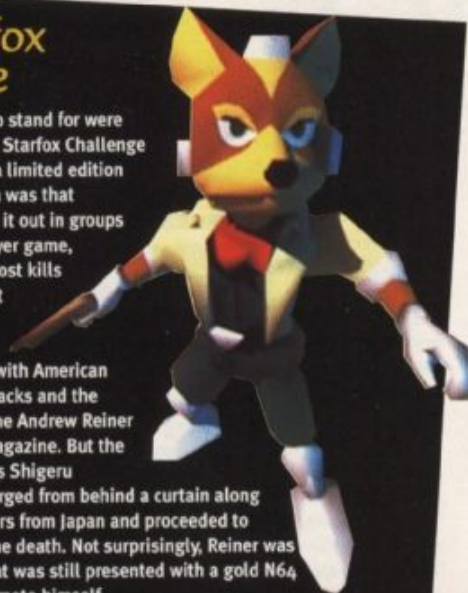
To prove how lifelike and visually impressive its baseball game was, Nintendo had it running next to a real baseball match using the same camera angles. Featuring Ken Griffey Jr, who is apparently some famous baseball-type bloke, *Major League Baseball* is packed with over 35,000 frames of animation and it certainly shows, with large rendered players performing every conceivable move, and this looks to be the most accomplished version of the sport yet. If you like that sort of thing. Expect a release in September in the US.



The Starfox Challenge

All around the Nintendo stand for were posters advertising the Starfox Challenge and the chance to win a limited edition leather jacket. The idea was that attendees would battle it out in groups of four in the multi-player game, and the one with the most kills would go on to the next round.

Obviously the competition was thick with American and European games hacks and the eventual winner was one Andrew Reiner from *Game Informer* magazine. But the best was yet to come as Shigeru Miyamoto himself emerged from behind a curtain along with some games testers from Japan and proceeded to engage in a battle to the death. Not surprisingly, Reiner was summarily whipped, but was still presented with a gold N64 joypad signed by Miyamoto himself.



VHS Disappointment

A major blow was the lack of playable versions of so many of Nintendo's flagship titles, which were instead only showing on a constantly looped tape. We had hoped to see *Zelda 64*, *F-Zero 64* and *Yoshi's Island*, but to no avail – they were withheld at the last minute.

Zelda 64 continues to impress, and judging by the combat scenes depicting Link battling with a giant skeleton and the Grim Reaper, it will be a sensational graphical adventure. But how long will must we wait? The decision to bring it out without the 64DD is a key move by Nintendo and it looks likely for a Christmas or early 1998 release. Many expect this to equal the standard of gameplay set by *Mario 64*.

F-Zero looked excellent though – a high speed rollercoaster ride which takes the original flat track Super NES

game and adds loop-the-loops, banked turns and incredibly slick chicanes and jumps. The ships are now made of polygons rather than sprites and are far more detailed, but apart from that the gameplay remains the same, and it was obviously in a very early state. The only cloud on the horizon is that *Extreme G* will probably be out before *F-Zero* and it looks just as fast.

Also shown on video was *Yoshi's Island*, which is a colourful horizontally scrolling variation of the Super NES game, not a 3-D platformer. *Body Harvest* was still early, but had plenty of shoot-'em-up action (and looked good), and *Mischief Makers* (actually out now in Japan as *Yuke Yuke!! Troublemakers* – see review on page 34) was a vivid, but hardly sensational looking platform adventure.

Tetrisphere

How to update the most simple game since *Pong*? Simple, make the whole thing based around a gigantic rotating sphere, with new blocks slotting in and incredible angles until you get right through to the core. *Tetrisphere* is a compelling idea and the slick graphics and presentation will undoubtedly make it a hit with Nintendo gamers who thirst for a puzzle game. Developed by Canadian programming house H2O, you will need all the skills of the original game, except you must also think in three dimensions against a strict time limit. A neat distraction and a solid addition to the N64 catalogue.

THIRD PARTY DEVELOPERS

LIKE AN OVER-PROTECTIVE PARENT, NINTENDO ALSO HAD MANY OF ITS THIRD PARTY DEVELOPERS ON ITS OWN STAND, WITH TITUS, HUDSONSOFT, BOSS GAME STUDIOS, KEMCO AND RARE ALL CLUSTERED AROUND THE BACK, ALTHOUGH THE LIKES OF OCEAN, DMA AND MIDWAY WERE SCATTERED TO THE FAR ENDS OF THE SHOW. WHAT DID THEY HAVE TO OFFER?

Hudsonsoft

Bomberman 64 was tested for the first time at E3 and it has to be said was a disappointment. Now that the game has been planted in an isometric landscape, it is far harder to find opponents, and there was a general feeling of "if it ain't broken, why fix it?" The control system was well implemented though, and graphically it is obviously much better, but purists will be horrified by this *Bomberman/Mario 64* monster. When they had something as perfect as the original Super NES *Bomberman*, whatever possessed Hudsonsoft to screw around with the formula?



Ocean

Curiously, Ocean's stand was invite-only this year, which is a bit silly when you think that a trade show is generally all about showing off and letting everyone see what you've got to offer.

The big disappointment was that *Mission: Impossible* was not ready and so no-one could play the game everyone's talking about. If you read the last issue of 64 MAGAZINE then you'll know how promising this game is, but sadly we'll have to wait even longer for a complete playtest.

Multi Racing Championship was available though, and it's looking better and better the more we see of it. All the cars have now been added and the two player split screen mode has been tweaked as well to avoid any speed problems. The most interesting feature of this game is that you can take many different routes throughout each level and there are loads of different driving conditions to test you. You also get full customisation (spoilers, transmission, tyres, suspensions etc). Expect a UK release of *MRC* after September which should mean about the same time as Kemco's *Top Gear Rally*.

Ocean also had a news of a brand new N64 title called *Space Circus*, which is about a series of sabotages on the titular show and your attempts to solve the crime. *Space Circus* is a 3-D game, much like *Banjo-Kazooie*, but with more adventure elements and far more humour. Expect a release not before mid 1998.

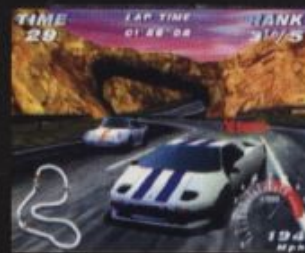


E3 Report

Titus

Crammed in the bottom corner of the Nintendo stand near the press desk was little known 64-bit developer Titus, which was showing its first big N64 game, *Lamborghini 64*. This is a racing game featuring the Lamborghini Diablo (any hopes of a complete Lambo line-up were soon dashed) and it looks pretty decent, although there was very little traffic in evidence, and the ultra-responsive control method took some getting used to. Graphically, the game is polished and detailed and just to ram home the point of the official Lamborghini licence, Titus also had a gleaming red real life Diablo dominating its stand. No free test drives though – damn them!

Titus was also debuting *Superman*, which looked still in its preliminary stages of development and is a 3-D adventure using the Man of Steel as the hero. Not surprisingly, Titus is keen to stress the X-ray vision superpowers which makes use of the N64's graphical hardware, but other than that it's still too early to say. Don't expect *Superman* to arrive until the end of this year, and don't forget that Titus is also converting *Virtual Chess* to the N64 – can't wait.



Kemco

Nothing to do with the coffee company which the adverts would have us believe is run by a horny woman in a short skirt rather than a bunch of fat old men in grey suits. Their big game, created by Boss Game Studios, was *Top Gear Rally*, which was the first proper racing game announced before Ocean's *MRC* and has thus received more attention from the press. Full playable booths were running the game, as well as a large projection TV for those who weren't afraid to embarrass themselves in front of a crowd. The game is now looking sensational, with realistic handling and *Sega Rally*-style cars which can be thrown all over the place. The desert section, snow and night sections were all tested and proved to be great fun, although the overall speed was not as high as expected, and it was tough

getting used to not over-working the analogue control. The only other comment made was that there wasn't really anything else on the track and so many of them seemed empty. A promising title though.

Kemco also had a snowboarding game running, called *Twisted Edge*, but it was just a rendered intro upon closer inspection and showed little of what to expect.



Midway

Midway's colossal stand was dominated by an eight coin-op link-up challenge on *San Francisco Rush*. The arcade quality N64 version was also on show and proved to be extremely playable, especially as the cars crumpled and gradually became more difficult to control. Graphically there is very little difference between the 64-bit version and the full blown coin-op, so expect high speed fun in November on import and the UK for Christmas. *Mortal Kombat Mythologies* is the 'long awaited' platform adventure starring members of the *Mortal Kombat* family – like the world was just crying out for a platform game based on a dodgy old beat-'em-up. First impressions were disappointing, as the game looks like nothing more than a 16-bit horizontally scrolling beat-'em-up, but it was still early, and the opening movies gave some indication of the majesty of the N64 version. *MK Mythologies* is subtitled *Sub-Zero*, and it is expected, if successful, there will be more games featuring different characters in the lead.



Mace: The Dark Age was an impressive looking slash-'em-up which boasted large screen-sized characters hacking divots out of each other with reckless abandon and is thought to be released in September. It certainly looked far better than *Killer Instinct Gold*, but then, most things are.

Quake was at last running, but the only level that was playable was the final one from the first zone (the one with a large red demon you must electrocute). This brief look still showed off the N64's ease with shifting this type of first person



perspective game around and it bodes well for the full game. This is going to be just as good as the PC version and again it shows up the PlayStation's inability to do this style of game.

Hot news off the press is that GT has bought the developer Single Trac (who produced *Twisted Metal 2* on the PlayStation) and that this company is at the moment working on a Nintendo 64 game. More details soon.

Hexen was also on-show, but that is reviewed in this very issue of 64 MAGAZINE, so you know what we think of that pile of tat.



Konami

Smug with the popularity of the superb *ISS 64*, Konami was riding on the quest of a wave and certainly had the loudest stand, as an obnoxious American shouted encouragement to contestants who stood a chance of winning \$50,000 if they scored a basket from 20ft. Presumably this was something to do with *NBA In the Zone '98*, but since we didn't win ten grand we couldn't be bothered to find out.

Big news on N64 from the Japanese games giant was the official *Nagano Winter Olympics* game due out in February for both N64 and PlayStation, and *Hybrid Heaven* for N64 only which is a 3-D fighting/esplionage game in a similar vein to *Metal Gear Solid* on PlayStation. Both were only on video, but looked very promising, with the *Olympics* game using the age-old joystick waggling method of building up energy bars to win events. This is perfectly suited to the N64's analogue joystick. Events include

snowboarding, ski jumping, skiing and speed skating. Cool. Konami had *Dracula 3-D* (*Castlevania 3-D*) on video also, and this showed the excellent graphics engine, but sadly not much else. We can tell that it will be very much like *Zelda 64*, but with a darker edge. Can't see this one arriving anytime soon.



Acclaim

Acclaim has had a tough time the last couple of years but a shrewd investment into respected long-time developer Probe has now reaped dividends in the form of *Extreme G*, a racing game that takes you to the limits of excitement.

Proudly showing on many of the monitors at the understated Acclaim stand, *Extreme G* was jaw droppingly fast, and contains tracks the like of which have never been seen before. One minute you're flying down a long straight; the road lines blurring due to the excessive speed, and the next the road drops straight down, and your speed bike literally takes off for the majority of the hill.

Graphically, *Extreme G* is pretty, but not overly detailed and this keeps the frame rate per second into the high sixties. The tracks twist and turn at a dizzying rate and many people left the stand completely disorientated due to the overwhelming level of concentration needed to get past the first lap. If we have a prediction for a game of the year, this could be it.

Acclaim was also showing *Forsaken* and *Quarterback Club '98* (American football, if you weren't sure) but nothing yet on *Turok 2*. Expect some early screenshots of this soon though.



THQ

One of the few third party developers with more than one title for the N64, THQ continues its relentlessly glorious relationship with Nintendo by being one of the few remaining Super NES and Game Boy publishers. At E3 were *Quest 64* and *WCW Nitro: World Tour*. The latter is a licenced wrestling game featuring 60 outgoing blokes in silly suits, 20 of which are WCW and New World

Order wrestlers. Due for a release in November, *WCW Nitro* looked very much like the PlayStation game, only with smoother graphics, slightly larger fighters, and far more colours. At this early stage, the movement was limited, but you do at least get the feel for what the finished game will be like. *WCW Nitro* was also on show in the Nintendo Sports Dome.

Quest 64 is, groan, a *Mario 64*-esque RPG which aims to give players a bit more depth than simply

stomping on enemy's heads and collecting coins. You take the roll of Shanjaque, a dude with the power to manipulate nature, who has become a Spirit Tamer. Unfortunately, the secret of the Spirit Tamers has been half-inched and thus ensues a 3-D graphical adventure which actually looks quite good. The level of detail and sense of perspective is particularly decent and *Quest 64* takes place over three countries – so it should prove quite a challenge.



GT Interactive

Of course the biggest attractions on the GT stand were *Duke Nukem* and *Quake*, and both were looking mighty fine on the N64, which is more than can be said for the PlayStation versions. *Duke Nukem* on PSX was a horrid jerky travesty compared to the sumptuous textures and free flowing movement of the N64 version, and it was good to see new areas and objects included in the game so that it isn't just a straight PC port.

Duke Nukem also boasted the two and four player split screen modes which were incredibly playable, if a little confusing because there are no borders between each screen and they tend to all blur together after a while. The *Duke* booth was also dwarfed by a huge model of the man himself up to his knees in spent gun casings. *Nukem* is still cool, even a year and half after his debut on PC. Some guys have just got it...



Gametek

Gametek's only confirmed UK N64 game was *Robotech: Crystal Dreams*, a space adventure/shoot-'em-up based on the vastly popular Japanese cartoon series (actually three different series hacked into one by the Yanks – Ed) which has unfortunately never been shown in the UK outside the graveyard shift on the Sci-Fi Channel. The game features huge 20km long texture mapped space ships and if you get tired of blasting the Zentraedi, you can always dock with your own capital ships and then wander around talking to crew members. *Robotech* promises plenty of laser-scorched action, but at the show the colours were muted and it didn't look as advanced as the developers claimed it was. More polish on the presentation is needed, but you can't deny that the depth of gameplay and the appeal for fans will make it popular in America at least. Will anyone ever get round to doing a



Battle Of The Planets game, though? Gametek also claimed that it would be bringing its conversions of the two hit US game shows *Wheel Of Fortune* and *Jeopardy* to the UK, but whereas

the former is actually quite popular over here, the latter certainly isn't. *Wheel Of Fortune* was incredibly good looking though. Just hope that the UK version doesn't have Bradley Walsh in it!

In Summary

WITHOUT A BIG PIECE OF HARDWARE NEWS, THIS YEAR'S E3 WAS NOT AN EPIC ONE FOR NINTENDO. WHAT WAS REALLY NEEDED WAS THE 64DD STRUTTING ITS STUFF, OR SOMETHING REALLY HUGE ON *F-ZERO 64* OR *ZELDA*. THAT WOULD HAVE DAZZLED EVERYONE AND DRAWN SOME ATTENTION FROM THE FACT THAT SONY HAD HUNDREDS OF NEW GAMES, MANY OF WHICH LOOKED VERY PROMISING INDEED. SCEPTICS MIGHT SAY THAT THE NINTENDO STAND LOOKED EMPTY, AND THAT TOO MANY OF THE KEY GAMES WERE NOT EVEN THERE, BUT THERE WERE PLENTY OF GEMS, YOU JUST HAD TO DIG DEEP FOR THEM. *EXTREME G* IS A GOOD EXAMPLE.

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT NINTENDO HAS RECOGNISED THAT CARTRIDGE PRICES ARE TOO HIGH AND IS ACTIVELY DOING SOMETHING ABOUT IT. WHAT THE N64 REALLY NEEDS NOW IS MORE QUALITY SOFTWARE – AND SOON. THERE WAS ALSO NOTHING FROM CAPCOM OR NAMCO – WHO WOULD LIKE TO BET MONEY THAT THERE ARE A FEW SURPRISES IN STORE REGARDING THOSE TWO IN THE NEAR FUTURE?

