

# Making Of... Blast Corps

Article scanné dans le magazine NGC Magazine n°65 (Mars 2002)

Sujet de l'article : Blast Corps

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.

## THE MAKING OF...

If the concept of a game based around demolition brought to mind the horrors of *Rampage*, the reality of *Blast Corps* showed what the idea could do in the hands of a world-class developer. Rare reveals all...

# THE MAKING OF... BLAST CO

## OPEN SESAME

The game's 50-plus areas open up in an unusual manner. Rather than have a set progression from one to the next, *Blast Corps*' designers opted for a system whereby different 'nodes' of the map are unlocked via discovering hidden 'communication points' or earning gold medals. It allows you to make significant progress without running into too many 'brick walls' – spikes in the difficulty level that might otherwise have seen the game consigned to the back of the cartridge drawer.



One of the most commonly held truisms is that the simplest ideas are often the best. So when Rare co-founder Chris Stamper set his designers and code monkeys the task of producing a game based around an ingenious twist on that most modest of pleasures – smashing things to tiny pieces on a grand scale – the company had to be on to another winner.

"If you knock down buildings it will be fun," suggested Stamper, sowing the seeds for what became arguably Rare's most original and offbeat N64 title. A small team was assembled to work on fleshing out this basic concept into a game worthy of a software house that had, prior to becoming

Britain's most revered developer with the release of *GoldenEye*, made its name with such huge hits as *Donkey Kong Country*, *Killer Instinct* and the seminal *Battletoads*.

### School building

"We had some very talented artists and engineers who were straight out of college," reveals a member of the original seven-strong *Blast Corps* team. "I think the combination of their enthusiasm and recently honed skills enabled us to produce some pretty interesting and unique work."

"At the time it was actually the largest team any of us had worked in, so it required a greater degree of co-ordination than we were used to. Since



## WHY BLAST CORPS WAS A CLASSIC

**GRAPHICS** Shiny metallic surfaces abound, the levels are packed with detail, and the game never slows down a jot, no matter how much is happening on screen. A great advert for the special effects hardware crammed into the N64.



**PUZZLES** You can't just ram your way through every level. In general the puzzles are quite simple, but when you're trying to think about how to move a vehicle from point A to point B, and all the while you can hear the carrier's siren growing louder and louder by the second, the tension is almost unbearable.

**BUILDINGS** Every structure in the game can be flattened, resulting in a hugely satisfying explosion. Even if it's not required in order to save the carrier, there are bonuses to be earned for turning each city into a desolate wasteland.

**VEHICLES** The game features enough high-powered vehicles of destruction to fill an entire Jeremy Clarkson TV series. Bulldozers, bikes, trucks, trains, cars, robots, buggies, boats, and pretty much everything else you could possibly imagine.

MAGIC MOMENT  
J-BOMB

This giant flying robot, a firm favourite of the Blast Corps team, is one of the easiest vehicles to use, and by far the most destructive. With the ability to smash entire tower blocks in a single attack, there's no point in using any other vehicle if J-Bomb is available – hence the machine's rarity. If J-Bomb had been used as often as many players wished, the game would likely have been stripped of much of its challenge and excitement.



RPS

then, team sizes have increased dramatically, but the *Blast Corps* team was still small enough to allow for individual members to make a very obvious contribution, and also meant

**“We simply wanted a game where you knocked down a load of buildings.”**

we stayed focused on the core elements of the game.”

The most important of those core elements was the missile carrier which players had to protect by demolishing the many buildings that littered its path.

If the carrier so much as touched an obstacle then it would trigger an apocalyptic explosion. After the carrier's path was cleared, players were able to return to level the rest of the buildings

in the cities they were formerly supposed to be ‘saving’ from destruction. It was, admits Rare, a “completely idiotic” concept, but one that formed the heart of an exceptionally compelling game.

**Vandal hearts**

“The basic premise never changed throughout the project,” says our *Blast Corps* insider. “We simply wanted a game where you knocked down a load of buildings. Everything really developed around this, and all the other elements were introduced to diversify the gameplay.”

It was a fully formed game from a very early stage in its development, with a ‘completeness’ matched, among the N64's early releases, only by Nintendo's in-house work. The confident young team was never troubled by the bugbears that were encountered by many other first-wave N64 coders – such as the numerous ongoing revisions to the machine's pre-

release hardware: “Things like that tend to be fairly superficial.”

The only thing the team had any bother with, however insignificant, was the N64's radically different controller, with the analogue stick that was soon to become a standard feature on PlayStation and all subsequent console pads. “To be honest, we kind of missed the point of it at the start,” admits a team member. “It wasn't until we played *Super Mario 64* that we saw the stick's potential.” The designers quickly added an option to use analogue acceleration as well as the standard analogue steering.

**Design demolition**

Having toyed with the idea of making



# THE MAKING OF...

## MAGIC MOMENT NEAR MISS

Having the missile carrier as a kind of mobile time limit is the game's master stroke. It means you're often forced to work within a few feet of the advancing truck, circling around it in a very fast, skittishly handling vehicle, and cutting directly across its path in order to take out chunks of scenery at the very last moment. Any minor prangs to the carrier (no doubt due to a sweaty analogue stick) are punished as severely as if it had crashed into a building – ie the unstable missiles will explode, everyone will die, and you will have failed the level.



## THE NAME GAME

Blast Corps is now a familiar name among N64 players, although several alternative titles were considered and rejected for various reasons. A team member explains: "We had a hard time finding names that weren't already trademarked, and it came down to a vote between 'Blast Corps' and 'Blastdozer'. 'Blast Corps' won so we went ahead with that, only to find several months later that we couldn't use it in Japan and had to revert to Blastdozer for that territory. Personally, I lost interest after they rejected my idea of 'Renegade Dismantler Corps'."



## OYSTER HARBOUR



While many of the game's main levels are meant to be approached with brute force, the puzzle-based Oyster Harbour stands out as a high point for players looking for something a little more cerebral.

The level opens with a quick spot of long-range shooting, followed by a frantic dash for the Ramdozer vehicle, which must be used to shunt crates of explosive onto a crane.



After using the TNT to remove a stubborn obstruction, there's a sliding-block puzzle to solve, and a series of barges that must be moved in the correct order. All against the tightest of time limits.

If there's a sequel, perhaps we'll see less of this type of challenge. Feedback suggested that most people preferred the mindless violence-based levels – which was, after all, the game's original concept.



## A LIKELY STORY...

The game's plot (devised by Rare's website manager and 'father' of mascot Mr Pants) is tenuous, to say the very least – a team of elite demolition experts clearing a path for a missile truck that can't slow down and must drive through the world's most densely populated areas. Hmm. But it could have been worse. "One of the ideas we nearly went with was that the driver of the nuclear carrier had a precariously balanced glass of Ribena in his cab and he didn't want to spill it over his new beige interior," says Rare. "Maybe we'll save that for the sequel..."

the carrier complete a more circuitous path around the levels, the team settled for concentrating the action in a narrow, straight line through the centre of each map. This way

the player would be forced to flatten specific buildings, and the gameplay could be very tightly focused. Although the levels are generally quite large, with many branching areas to find, the game was designed to be explored at a more leisurely pace once the serious business of saving the carrier was completed.

With Blast Corps' basic mechanics in place almost from the beginning, the developers were able to add whatever their imaginations could conjure up. The huge range of vehicles is the most obvious indication of the time and freedom that Rare had, but it wasn't

simply a case of dropping every tiny idea into the game. Rare's quality control meant that things such as giant robotic mantis and scorpion craft were dropped in favour of less spectacular, but more challenging, vehicles like the notorious Backlash truck – a dumpster with a very difficult sliding attack that didn't find favour with every Blast Corps player.

"Backlash was the vehicle that required the most skill to use," counters a team member, in defence of his creation. "Its attack was based on the powerslide in Super Mario Kart. I guess

some people just couldn't be bothered to learn how to use it properly and consequently found it a bit frustrating."

Despite not achieving the kind of sales it deserved, Blast Corps stands out as one of the N64's more impressive titles. Released shortly after the machine's March 1997 UK launch, but with the kind of design innovation and technical expertise that very few coders outside Nintendo ever came close to equalling, it was the game that established Rare as the company few N64 fans (or magazines) could stop talking about. **NGC**



## LEVEL TOUR: CARRICK POINT



### MAGIC MOMENT FUNDAY DRIVER

One of the best things about the game is discovering new vehicles. Special levels, generally involving causing a specific amount of destruction against the clock, introduce the important ones, and others are lying around waiting to be discovered.



● The first vehicle you get here is **Sideswipe**, a truck that looks like a futuristic petrol tanker, but contains a destructive surprise in its yellow trailer – a pair of battering rams that can flatten any buildings placed close to either side of it. But there's no way past the carrier on that narrow bridge...



● The solution is to take a detour **around the side of the harbour**, leaving the carrier to trundle across the bridge. There isn't a lot of time to spare before it hits the first obstacles on the other side, so a swift demolition job is called for as you race around to find something with a little more destructive ability.



● Luckily the **Thunderfist** robot is waiting **Dragon Punch** attack is just the ticket for wiping out large or small buildings, and you can clear the carrier's path without having to change vehicles again (unless you want to finish the level in style).



● With the path to the end of the level fully cleared, you have a little extra time to find another vehicle and earn a few bonus points for demolishing some of the peripheral buildings. Of course, you could just get into the truck at the end, then return later to explore and/or wreak havoc at your leisure.



● The **Ballista** bike is equipped with twin rocket launchers, which you must keep topped up by collecting the ammo crates dotted around the place. It's somewhat haphazard and indiscriminate in its destructive power, and that carrier is still rolling towards the finishing line. Mistakes are easily made.



● After the carrier has completed its journey, the level ends and you're given the stats that tell you just how much mayhem you've caused, and how many secrets remain hidden. The only way to find them all is to return to the level, this time minus the carrier and any buildings you already wrecked.



MARCH 2002 NGC 53