

Nintendo versus the World

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NINTENDO VERSUS THE WORLD!

Everyone's expecting big things from the Ultra 64 - Nintendo themselves, developers and consumers alike. It's the most anticipated hardware launch in history, and it's set to change the face of videogaming forever.

But are Nintendo going to be find it all plain sailing? Is there a danger that we're rather conveniently forgetting about the other machines which threaten to make its life tough, at the very least? Cue an in-depth Super Play investigation.

We're profiling the four big formats - PlayStation, Saturn, 3DO and PC - that the Ultra 64 will go head to head against in what promises to be the most fiercely fought videogame battle in history. And we've been talking to experts from right across the gaming spectrum to find out how they see things turning out.

Hold on to your potatoes, this could get messy...



Launched in Japan in December '94 and in the UK in September this year, the PlayStation has become the must-have piece of gaming kit to those who take their gaming seriously. Sony claim to have sold 50,000 machines in Europe to date, but sales have slackened recently.

Power

Sony's machine has had a clear advantage over Sega's rival unit thanks to a stack of favourable press coverage and a wider choice of software. There has not yet been the same polygon title on both formats, making direct power comparisons difficult. It's important to note that it's easier to get to grips with development-wise, meaning that its potential is likely to be realised more quickly than the

Sony PlayStation

Saturn's. Some of its capabilities approach those of the Ultra 64, but in the words of a developer who knows both systems intimately, "the PlayStation looks like an 8-bit system by comparison".

Killer games

Ridge Racer (a neat, if slightly short coin-op conversion), *Wipe Out* (overly flashy futuristic racer which takes about five years of play to master), *Tekken* (Namco's first System 11 game, which is actually better than the coin-op), and *Doom* (*Doom*).

Future

Bright, but not as bright as Sony will have initially forecast. Some developers, especially those in the West, are already settling into the sort of lull which brought about the collapse of the SNES and Mega Drive market, and there are already a number of unimaginative titles available for the machine, with loads more set to follow.

Chances against the Ultra 64

Probably the best of all the formats here, but Sony must still be shaking in their corporate boots. The Ultra 64's unique colour-handling, shading and texture-mapping abilities ensure that its games look much more realistic and sophisticated, while Sony's in-



house programming resources are pitiful compared to Nintendo's. There's no doubt that the Ultra 64's arrival will bring Sony's holiday period to an abrupt end.

SAY WHAT?

Steve Jarratt, Editor, *The Official PlayStation Magazine*
Mr Jarratt's been putting together top gaming mags for longer than some of our readers have been in long trousers, so it almost goes without saying that's he's picked up a thing or three during his toils.

Having edited our sister mag *Total!*, he knows the Nintendo market better than most. How does he see the Ultra 64 performing against the machine which may well become its main competitor?

"The PlayStation has already shifted two million units in Japan, 300,000 in the US and is on target to shift 175,000 in the UK by March of

1996. By the time the NU64 is widely available, Sony will have an installed user base of well over three million, probably nearer four. The PlayStation is here to stay.

Also, by then, programmers will be on their second or third generation PS titles. If the machine is as powerful as Sony suggest, I don't think we've seen the best from the machine by a long run. However, my gut reaction is that the NU64 will still be massively popular - especially in Japan and the US. I think Europeans are less loyal, though, and don't have the same Nintendo history. And I still have my doubts about the NU64's storage medium. If they get the price of the carts (and/or bulky storage?)

wrong, they will suffer, and Sony have the wherewithal to drop their CD prices much more easily than with cartridge. It's difficult to predict the outcome when I've seen NOTHING on the NU64, but a few things are certain:

1) Sony is bigger than Nintendo by a very large factor (second biggest electronics company in the world, after Matsushita). They have deep pockets indeed and having fought to establish a foothold in this market they won't give up without a bloody and protracted fight.

2) Nintendo are out a very late second. I personally think they might have lost the battle for the UK and Europe already.

3) Sega are out of the picture."

Sega Saturn



Going head to head with the PlayStation when it hit Japanese stores in late '94, the Saturn has been running behind Sony's machine ever since. Lack of large-scale third-party support is one factor that's accounted for it failing to make the impact Sega were hoping for.

Power

The Saturn's technical prowess has been the subject of much debate. In theory, it could blow the pants off the PlayStation where 2D graphics are concerned (thanks to its 2D-specific chipper), but in 3D terms it's a close run thing. And a rough look

to some of its polygon-based games coupled with its limited shading capabilities makes Sega's machine a very poor second to the NU64.

Killer games

Virtua Fighter (slick if glitchy conversion of the coin-op which changed beat-'em-ups forever by introducing a third dimension), *Virtua Fighter 2* (stunning translation of the sequel which shows off the Saturn's hardware more effectively than any other game), and *Sega Rally* (good-looking and nippy version of AM3's topper coin-op).

Future

Pretty grim. Sega have reacted quickly to the successful UK launch of the PlayStation by dropping their unit's price from £399 to £349, with some retailers scraping that price point down even further in an effort to place it on a par with Sony's machine. Even though Sega themselves are beginning to turn out some sterling efforts, third party support remains strained, and clawing ground back now is going to be tougher than leather.

Chances against the Ultra 64

Hardly any. The Mega Drive's early victory against the SNES was largely down to three factors – it came out first, it was cheaper, and it had more software support in its formative years. Even

though the Saturn will have long since been the first to market by the time Nintendo's machine arrives, the big N's price advantage and launch title quality will send Sega running for cover, possibly to return with the Saturn Mk II in late '96/early '97, though they'll probably continue to concentrate on coin-op work.



IT'S OVER TO YOU

Nick Merritt, Editor, Sega Power
Nick's been a Sega stalwart since his days editing mags such as Sega Pro at Paragon Publishing. He now cracks the whip across the back of his Sega Power crew just across the office from Super Play (where they conduct regular assaults on our delicate ears with their dodgy CD collection). How does he see the Saturn's performance in the face of competition from Nintendo?

"Sega have made several strategic mistakes. They've produced rushed hardware, which is now being redesigned in an attempt to cut costs. Secondly, they have allowed others to gain the initiative, from the beefing up of the Saturn's design in response to Sony, to its early launch. Thirdly, from my position, the specialist press and advertising support has not been good. Sega have not been visible enough. The Saturn already seems like yesterday's news, especially now the Ultra 64 is on its way. And Sega now have Nintendo to deal with too. Nintendo have the games and the reputation. The Saturn is caught in the middle with Sony's marketing on one side and excitement about the Ultra 64 on the other. This may change, with excellent titles finally appearing. But any news to come is likely to get swamped by Nintendo. It's a pity because the Saturn is a good machine, mishandled by a company that should be doing better."

3DO



its 2D has been shown up as rather sickly and its 3D capabilities dated. 12 months is a long time in videogames.

Killer games

Road Rash (highly enjoyable extension of EA's hit Mega Drive game), *Super Street Fighter II Turbo* (technically accomplished conversion), *Return Fire* (corking update of the Amiga game *Firepower*)

Future

3DO owners have relatively few things to be happy about, but that's set to change with the arrival of the M2 add-on in 1996. Hardware designers responsible for the accelerator claim that its PowerPC-based chipset offers enough muscle to push it way beyond the Ultra 64, though the two games we've seen – a sad-looking update of *Clayfighter* and an unimaginative 3D beat-'em-up – are hardly the stuff to get gamers chomping at the bit.

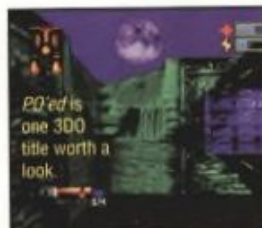
Chances against the Ultra 64

Slight at best. As proficient as the best Western 3DO coders are, they haven't been able to deliver the type,

launched originally as a 'multimedia machine' (always a mistake if you're planning to snatch market share away from game-oriented companies like Nintendo and Sega) back in 1993, the poor old 3DO format has floundered miserably. Why? Software, mainly – two years since launch, The 3DO Company are touting games like *John Madden Football* and *Road Rash* – two of the oldest games on the system – as the best it has to offer. Doh. (Or rather "3Doh", perhaps.)

Power

The 3DO's first game, *Crash 'n' Burn*, was a turning point in gaming – it offered the opportunity for fast, full 3D texture-mapped playing environments. Since the arrival of the PlayStation and Saturn, however,



quality or quantity of Japanese software which Sega and Nintendo have relied on for success in the last decade (the efforts from the small band of Japanese companies who have actually got behind the system varying from atrocious to simply adequate). Without the quality software to back up its raw power, even the M2 has no

chance in the face of a software-laden Nintendo.

THE BIG PICTURE

Jason Brookes, Editor, Edge

An early graduate of the Super Play School Of Videogaming, this chap now spends most of his time trotting around the globe, attending lavish software launches and meeting up with the likes of Miyamoto at private parties on expensive yachts (the swine).

His vantage point at the helm of glossy gaming mag Edge places him as something of a mover and shaker. So, Mr. Brookes, how do you see things shaping up?

"Sony have got off to a good start and seem to be doing a good job of seducing the mass market into embracing videogames again. They have a powerful, affordable

machine and some good launch software.

Wipeout, for example, is striking – perhaps not quite up to Nintendo's standards but a brilliant exercise in design. I'm sure that Sony will be successful with the PlayStation. How successful, depends upon their developers and Sony's own development efforts which, so far, haven't amounted to much.

Sega and 3DO are both bringing along undesirable baggage. 3DO has a history of poor games development and unspectacular performance, while Sega have only recently demonstrated that its Saturn can hack it with the likes of *VF2* and *Sega Rally*. Neither company will be able to compete with either

Sony or Nintendo in the games market.

The Ultra 64 will be a major leap over the competition (perhaps with the exception of 3DO's M2). It seems it's the quality of the NU64's graphics that will set it a whole league apart from what's possible on the PlayStation and Saturn. Expect a high quality, sharp, detailed look to the games. With Miyamoto on the design side, there can be little question about their design sensibilities, either. Cartridge pricing, viability, and the number of games in development still remain the moot points. I still want an Ultra 64 even more than I wanted a Super Famicom five years ago. It's about to get a whole lot more interesting..."





PC

When the Amiga began to flounder it was left to the PC to pick up the baton for gamers with a preference for keyboard interfaces over joypads. If you want to play PC games at their very best you'll have to be spend around £2,000 on a set-up, although many users get by with systems costing only as little as half that.

Power

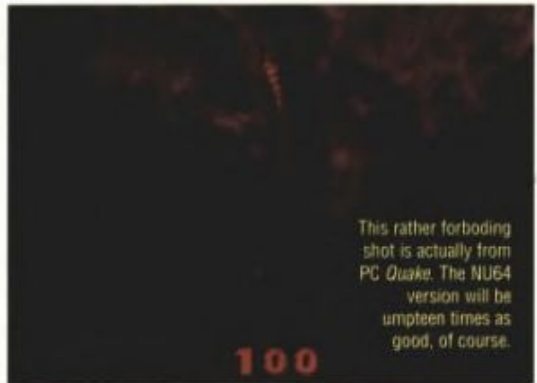
Varies depending on how deep your pockets are. At present, even a Pentium 133MHz cannot deliver games of a quality on par with the PlayStation, something that's painfully apparent with the recent PC conversions of *WipeOut* and *Destruction Derby*. The machine's most commonly used display mode, VGA (horribly chunky in comparison to even a SNES), is the chief reason why many people won't even go near a PC, let alone think about investing in such an expensive piece of hardware.

Killer games

Sam And Max Hit The Road (unique point-and-click graphic adventure with some genuine belly larfs into the bargain), *Civilisation* (hugely involving and drawn-out strategy/God sim), *Hexen* (extension of *Doom* based in a clichéd fantasy setting).

Future

Because of its open architecture, the PC is naturally the machine with the most life left in it. Endowed with all manner of orifices into



This rather forboding shot is actually from PC *Quake*. The NU64 version will be umpteen times as good, of course.

which you can stick various devices and upgrades, it's both the tech-head's dream and the plug-in-and-play fan's nightmare. It can only get more powerful as time goes on, but its sheer frustration-inducing make-up will prevent it moving into the gaming mainstream, as only the clinically insane will ever want to get involved with things like CONFIG.SYS files.

Chances against the Ultra 64

It's said that it'll take PC technology at least another five years to catch up with that of the Ultra 64, so the format's hardly in a good position to compete with the NU64 directly. Where it excels, however, is in multi-user environments – an area that Nintendo is known to be looking looking at very closely, if not committing to heavily at this point.



Hexen. So detailed you even see your character's array of goth jewellery.

Jonathan Davies, Editor, PC Gamer

Long-serving *Super Play* readers will remember Jonathan when he was but a cog (albeit a pleasantly-shaped one) in the well-oiled machine that is this very mag. He's since edited *Amiga Power* and his imposing frame can now be seen casting a shadow across the office of PC Gamer.

He's always good for a bit of an opinion is our Jonathan, so let's find out how he sees the PC standing in the grand scheme of things.

"The PC is a dreadful old dinosaur that was designed in about 1981 and became obsolete a couple of years later. It's a mess inside – a chaotic assembly of circuit boards, chips, disk drives and bits of wire – and an absolute nightmare to use – DOS is a primitive relic from 1970s laboratories, with the much-vaunted *Windows 95* simply making matters worse. And yet, bizarrely, fifteen years later PCs still sell by the million, at anything up to £2,500 a time. And because they sell by the million, they're the only computers that software gets written for, which, strangely, is why they sell by the million.

But! If you can afford the initial outlay ("It's for doing work on" is the normal justification), and manage to get it working, the PC is a fantastic games machine. Anyone can write games for it – you don't need expensive development kit, or have to pay crippling licensing fees to Nintendo – and the finest programmers in the world constantly try to outdo each other using it. Flight sims like *EF2000* are just like flying real planes, especially if you buy a special 15-button analogue joystick with independent throttle and 'Coolie hat' view control; you haven't lived unless you've played *Doom* against three other players across a network, or *Civilization* against someone in America over the Internet; *Command & Conquer* is perhaps the most difficult game ever written; and next year's games – like *Urban Decay*, *Dungeon Keeper* and *Quake* – look at least five times as good, or twenty times over a multi-player network. What's more, you shouldn't have to pay more than about £35 for a PC game – you can pick up year-old ones for a tenner, in fact – and you can play cut-down shareware versions of games like *Hexen* and *Duke Nukem 3D* for free.

The Ultra 64 will probably be great for a while, just like the SNES was three years ago. But, like a hideous vampire, the PC will live forever, constantly evolving through bolt-on upgrades and slot-in processors, and crushing the consoles beneath its cold, beige, metal fist."

A PC STANCE?

TO CONCLUDE...

So where does all this leave us? We've looked at the machines and we've talked to the people who matter. One common point that's shone through is that Sega are no longer the force they once were. It's been suggested that Sega just got lucky with the Mega Drive – its precursor, the Master System, was a flop in the States and Japan, and they've underachieved in spectacular style since with the Mega CD and 32X. Now we can safely rule them out of the equation, what about Sony? To give them their due they've amassed enormous media support and have got a machine into homes which delivers the performance of a modern coin-op. But it's still far, far from what the Ultra 64 can deliver. Many of those who've rushed out to buy PlayStations have done so because they're not really aware of what's around the corner – because Nintendo haven't allowed them to become aware, by keeping everything behind closed doors. 'Demonstrations' of the Ultra 64's power – in

the guise of coin-ops *Killer Instinct* and *Cruis'n USA*, show little that can't be run on the Saturn or PlayStation, but they're not representative of the unit's final specs.

And how can The 3DO Company even hope to dig up software of the quality that Nintendo pushes out every year without fail? They can't, and, in accordance with the tired-but-true "software sells machines" adage, it's why their sales will fall way behind the enormous success of Nintendo.

It's risky to put so much faith in a format which has just been delayed another six months because of various 'problems', but all the ingredients are there – SGI technology, a revolutionary form of control, Shigeru Miyamoto – and they sit under the umbrella of a company that knows games better than any other in the world.

So it's hard to imagine Nintendo's machine being anything other than the success they are desperately hoping for.

Only a miserable range of launch software could ruin things now. We'll be here to judge its worth in detail next month...