

# Reinventing the N64

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Un article sur le Disk Drive 64, le Transfer Pak et le micro.

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## Reinventing the Nintendo 64

At the recent Space World expo, Nintendo unveiled all manner of N64-transforming devices. Edge plugged in...





**T**ypically, time has proved that any peripheral or add-on for a games system will often struggle to sell in significant numbers. It's a situation that has repeatedly left a bad taste in Sega's mouth due to the failure of its Mega CD and 32X systems, and perhaps more than anything it's a concept that seems to be fundamentally at odds with the entire 'plug 'n' play' console philosophy. Subsequently, pundits

64DD – played host to the original 8bit *Legend of Zelda* a while before a cartridge version appeared. The Famicom Disk System, launched in February 1986, was an attempt to counter rising ROM costs (Famicom disks were roughly half of the price of cartridge games) as well as effort to streamline its software business. Via disk writers in retail outlets across Japan, consumers could overwrite their disks with new titles for as little as ¥500 (£2.50). And, in a

### The add-on is a concept that seems to be fundamentally at odds with the 'plug 'n' play' console philosophy

both inside and outside of Nintendo have known that if the 64DD is to succeed, it will need a killer app to sell units. It was anticipated that were *Zelda 64* to be available only on 64DD, this could have provided enough gamers with sufficient incentive to invest in the additional hardware. But now it seems that with N64 sales still struggling, in Japan at least, promotion of the 64DD is a luxury that Nintendo can't afford – *Zelda* is needed to help fight on the home front where cartridges will remain the sole ammunition for the next six months.

Ironically, Nintendo's first dalliance with an external storage medium – a piece of hardware that bore uncanny similarities to the

smart commercial move, the original *Zelda* (see page 101) was only available for the Disk System.

However, despite quality games appearing for the system (*Metroid* first appeared on disk, too), it was a strategy that eventually turned sour, despite Nintendo selling almost two million systems in 1986 and more than double that number by 1990. A combination of consumer confusion regarding a dual-format console, piracy and contractual problems with licensees meant that disks were eventually phased out in favour of cartridges in the early '90s.

Naturally, with only six months to go before the 64DD's launch, speculation is already rife as to whether a similar fate awaits the

64bit equivalent. Certainly, the line-up of software unveiled at Space World '97 would suggest that Nintendo has possibly reviewed its immediate priorities for 64DD with 'creativity' and 'cash-in' being appropriate buzzwords emerging from the post-Space World haze. What does seem clear is that as well as developing its promising *Mario Artist* series, Nintendo has been equally busy capitalising on the valuable *Pocket Monsters* franchise – possibly at the expense of the kind of titles more suited to westerners.

**Jez San** of Argonaut (a company that has traditionally worked very closely with Nintendo) concurs with this view. 'Rumours have been circulating for a while that recently within Nintendo the main priority has been *Pocket Monsters*, even at the expense of Nintendo 64,' he reveals. 'I heard that they were taking development staff off other games and projects to make sure that *Pocket Monsters* was done on time. Mr. Yamauchi's speech today confirmed that *Pocket Monsters* are foremost in his mind, and maybe this is why the release of the 64DD system itself has been pushed back,' he concludes. Either way, the 64DD isn't scheduled for release outside of Japan any time soon.

So will the 64DD become just an interesting footnote to the Nintendo 64 story? Or will it truly be a platform to open up new avenues for Nintendo gaming? Some of the answers surely lie in the software that will make or break the system's launch in six months' time. **Edge** takes a closer look...



From top: *Zelda 64*, once thought a crucial 64DD title, is leading on cart; *Mario RPG 2* is 64DD-bound; *Mother 3* will no doubt boost system sales; *Sim City 64* looks promising



Nintendo's first effort at an add-on device, 1986's Japan-only Famicom Disk System, fell far short of being the success it was intended to be



## MARIO ARTIST SERIES

Nintendo's apparent riposte to Sony's Yaroze is more of an outflanking manoeuvre than a confrontation, changing the boundaries of battle



The two additional devices for use with the *Mario Artist* suite are the N64 mouse and the video-capture cartridge. Video-in quality is likely to be merely adequate.

**C**reativity has always been on Nintendo's 64DD agenda. The latest evidence is provided by the new *Mario Artist* titles announced at the Space World event.

Consisting of three ambitious pieces of software that are far better served by the verb 'application' than 'game', the progression from the old SNES title *Mario Paint* is dramatic. While each of the *Mario Artist* titles deals with a specific area of creative activity, the three are complementary and data is intended to be shared between them.

*Talent Maker*, the first of the series, is essentially a figure-modelling program, featuring all of the expected Nintendo quirks. Used in conjunction with the new video-capture cartridge, *Talent Maker* will allow users to grab images of their own faces and map them onto figures in the application. Finished creations can then be mapped onto preset animation paths, or placed into one of the built-in mini-games.

The second *Artist* title, *Picture Maker*, bears a resemblance to *Mario Paint*. Nintendo's programmers have clearly been influenced by Adobe



Pricing is yet to be confirmed, but the full gamut of *Artist* accessories is likely to require a hefty outlay prior to creativity commencing. A western release is – predictably – only a slim possibility

*Photoshop*, as *Picture Maker* features some surprisingly high-end tools – including special effects filters, plus a wide selection of brushes and textures. As an added bonus, the animated 3D dinosaurs from the now-defunct *Creator* title (originally developed in the UK by Software Creations) are bundled with the application, and users will be able to alter the standard texture maps.

Last of the applications is the self-descriptive *Polygon Maker*. By using a variety of primitives and

extrusions, polygon models can be easily created and then textured. *Polygon Maker* is probably the most powerful of the *Artist* trio, although the potential for cross-pollination between the three means they should perhaps be treated as one single application.

With a fourth music-oriented title in the works, and an N64 printer rumoured to be in development, the *Mario Artist* series has to be viewed as both a courageous and credible development. **E**

### Picture Maker

These screens belie the power of the 64DD's paint package. The shot second from left illustrates the variety of materials on offer. Drawing freehand with a mouse is tricky, never mind trying with a joystick.



### Talent Maker

Unadulterated silliness is bound to be an adjunct of *Talent Maker*'s self-sourced texture-mapping facilities. Creative N64 users will be able to place a likeness of themselves in a simplistic mini-game (far right).



### Polygon Maker

While the *Talent* and *Picture* modules are fairly light-hearted, *Polygon Maker* is a surprisingly powerful application – as these screens show. Having said that, *Edge* wouldn't relish creating the Mario model from scratch.





## 64GB PAK

Nintendo's new 64GB Pak allows the transfer of data between an N64 and a Game Boy. It may sound a frivolous concept on the face of it, but Nintendo knows otherwise...

In one of its shrewdest moves in years, Nintendo has created a controller pack which allows the massively popular (in Japan) *Pocket Monster* Game Boy titles to be linked directly to the Nintendo 64.

The first title to utilise the connection is *Pocket Monster Stadium*, which allows data from the Game Boy carts to be uploaded and translated into 3D models. Where favourite monsters were once no more than a collection of statistics and lumpy bitmaps, the N64 cartridge

will render detailed and lively representations. Once up on screen, the various creations can be fought against each other. Animation and graphic effects are better than expected for a title with such inauspicious visual roots.

With support for up to four players, *Pocket Monster Stadium* has all the right credentials to do the same for the N64's popularity as the original game did for the Game Boy – making Nintendo enormously profitable in the process.

**E**



The 64GB Pak caters for the insertion of individual Game Boy cartridges, rather than a direct connection between the two consoles



### Pokemon Stadium

If any title other than *Legend of Zelda 64* can salvage the N64 in Japan, it is this. *Pocket Monster* fanatics (of which there are millions in Japan), will be able to recreate their humble beasts in detailed, colourful 3D.



### Pokemon Snap

Perhaps the oddest of all the 64DD titles unveiled at Space World, *Pokemon Snap* invites players to enter a virtual world inhabited by Pocket Monsters – their 'mission' is then to 'photograph' a selection.

## N64 HEADSET

The virtual pet leaps several evolutionary rungs

Again created for use with a *Pokemon* game, Marigul and Nintendo's Voice Recognition Headset is a remarkable achievement. Demonstrations of the device were immediately successful, recognising various male and female Japanese voices. The game, *Pikachu Genki De Chu* (which translates as 'Pikachu is feeling great'), creates a virtual pet, and thus far is the only game to use the add-on. While Pikachu is an endearing character and the headset a definite step forward, *Edge* can help but wonder what Nintendo's long-term intentions are for the device. It will be an interesting item to watch...

**E**

While this initial virtual pet game may appear a lightweight use for the N64 voice recognition system, its use and acceptance will doubtless be watched with keen interest by developers worldwide



In some ways, *Pikachu Genki De Chu*'s environments are similar to those of *Jungle Emperor Leo*. To what extent players will be able to interact with Pikachu hasn't yet been divulged, although the headset's recognition facility seems to cope very well with a variety of voices