The Medium is The Message

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Un article sur le 64DD et ses périphériques.

Video Game News

The Medium Is The Message

As expected, the 64DD made its appearance at this year's Nintendo Space World 1997, held Nov. 21-24 at the Makuhari Messe outside of Tokyo. The device hadn't been seen or heard from since last year's show, and while Nintendo announced a handful of additional titles that will be coming to the DD (and peripherals to go with them), no games were playable.

During his annual speech, Nintendo president Hiroshi Yamauchi announced that the DD will hit Japanese shelves in June of '98, instead of April as originally planned. The exact cost of the system will be announced in early 1998.

But the disappointment from the lack of

Nintendo proves that the DD is more than just your average add-on

playable games and the delay was displaced by the games Nintendo showed on tape for the DD—including Mother 3 (Earthbound 64), Pocket Monsters Stadium, Pocket Monsters Snap, Super Mario RPG 2, Picture Maker, Polygon Maker, Talent Maker, SimCity 64 and SimCopter. All incorporate Nintendo's vision of the DD—writability and creativity.

The DD also opens up the option of bringing two separate games together, either by expanding a current cartridge or combining data from two different titles. "You could have a game, and we have talked about this in the context of the SimCity product family, where SimCity might be a disk-based game and SimCopter might be a cartridge-based game that would read the city data that you generated off SimCity and then would let you fly around your own SimCity. Or Streets of SimCity could be another add-on Sim file," said

Jim Merrick, Nintendo's project manager of software engineering. "It actually is something that Maxis is working on now." The method of combining data from one title to use in another is also being used in the Mario Artist Series.

Merrick says that Nintendo will not be pushing developers to make disk games over the current cartridge format. "That is up to the developer. We want people to support the DD. We think it offers many advantages for the licenses and the consumer. But it's up to the developer ultimately as to what they choose to write for," he says. "There are some games that there might be a cartridge version and a disk version, and the disk version might offer some enhancements over the cartridge version. So that is up in the air right now. We are not going to pull the plug on cartridges..."

The added storage space and lower cost of producing a disk game will undoubtedly be tempting to developers who have not yet joined Nintendo's ranks. However, 64 Megabytes still isn't as much storage as a CD (650 MB), a drawback which might be considered by some to be fatal. CD audio and full-motion video are luxuries not afforded to developers by the DD.

Could Nintendo have increased the storage space that the DD could hold per disk? "Yes, it could have been larger. You know, it doesn't seem as large now when you have a cartridge game [Zelda 64] that is 32 MB. That's half the size of the DD. But we're really aware of the price sensitivity issue. We feel that over time prices of games are going to drive down," Merrick says. "It still is quite a bit of storage capacity when you consider that we are not advocates for full-motion video and other things that eat up a lot of CD space. The real-time stuff that you see in Zelda or Star Fox is every bit is as dramatic as FMV sequences and still tells the story equally as well, but uses the real models

and takes a fraction of the space."

Multidisk games are definitely a possibility in the future, and Merrick told us that there are actually seven different ratios of read to write that a DD disk can have. The entire disk can be used as read-only, and up to 38.44 MB of a disk can be writable.

The drive spins at one continuous rate, so there's a trade-off between write and read speed as the heads read closer to the center of the disk. Merrick told us that developers will have to decide how to use that to their advantage.

The U.S. release of the 64DD remains sketchy. George Harrison, Nintendo of America's vice president of marketing and corporate communications, told us that the DD would hit the U.S. after its Japanese release. "We won't talk about our plans [for the U.S.] until E³. It won't go until the software is ready. What we are seeing here is a demonstration of several new products but we still have to determine which one we will launch it with," he said. "We find that we will have to sell the DD to somewhere between 60 and

Jim Merrick, Nintendo of America's project manager of software engineering discusses with *EGM* the advantages the 64DD offers developers.

80 percent of the N64 installed base and that will be quite a challenge. It is something that never has been done before."

The idea that a peripheral could be accepted by over half of the installed base of the original system would be a feat not duplicated in the video game industry before. But Nintendo has already done the impossible by introducing a successful cartridge-based game system in an industry dominated by the CD storage medium. At E³ in May, Nintendo will show the DD for the first time on U.S. soil, and will probably at that time introduce additional games to launch it with in North America.

Check out our previews of Nintendo's new N64 and DD games later on in this issue.

Pocket Monsters Stadium, a DD version of the popular Game Boy series will help make the 64DD a hit in Japan. The mega-popular series has sold over 7.5 million units for the Game Boy since its introduction in February 1997.

N64, TRANSFORM!

Nintendo 64GB Pak

Nintendo 64 Mouse

Nintendo 64 Capture Cassette

Nintendo 64 Voice Recognition System

Amtex's Bio-Tetris

Game Boy Pocket Camera and Printer

Peripheral Visions

The most interesting part of Space World '97 (apart from the games) was the sheer number of peripherals for the N64 and Game Boy. At least a few of these will make their way across the Pacific, so to give you a glimpse of what you might be adding to your GB or N64, here's a rundown of the peripherals of Space World:

The Game Boy Pocket Camera and Pocket Printer capitalize on the current photo sticker booth craze by allowing people to use the Game Boy as a digital camera. The screen acts as the viewfinder, and you can snap and save up to 30 pictures on a single cartridge. The snapshots can then be edited or painted on, and then printed out onto stickers using the Pocket Printer. Both go on sale in Japan in February for about $50, and also come in different colors (corresponding to the GB Pocket colors).

Moving to the N64, Nintendo has a way for gamers to bring portable games home and play them on the N64 and vice versa. Pokemon (short for Pocket Monsters), having sold 7.5 million copies in Japan, is the main reason behind the device, which lets the N64 share data with the Game Boy and vice versa. Pokemon fans can then bring their monsters home, use them to battle using the Pokemon Stadium 64DD game and then take them on the road with the Game Boy. There's no doubt that this will give Japanese gamers a huge incentive to buy a Nintendo 64 and a DD to go along with it (just to play Pokemon).

One of the strangest N64 peripherals yet comes with BioTetris, currently scheduled for a March release in Japan from Amtek. The game comes with a clip that clips to your ear, and connects to the N64 controller. It reads your biorhythms and adjusts the game's difficulty accordingly. You might

say that this is the Tetris that gets into your head, literally. The game and clip will set you back about $70 when it's released.

Ever find yourself talking to your favorite game? Nintendo and Marigul intend to capitalize on this by bringing out a Voice Recognition System for the N64. The first game to use it is Pikachu Genki De Chu, starring one of the more popular (and cute) characters from Pokemon. Scheduled for release next fall, the VRS will retail for about $30 in Japan.

Nintendo's also got a host of N64 peripherals to use with upcoming games. The Nintendo 64 Mouse will come in handy for games like SimCity 2000, SimCity 64 and the Mario Artist Series. Mario Artist will also take full advantage of the Capture Cassette—which has video, audio and microphone inputs for collecting video and audio data to use.

There's also a digital camera interface cartridge coming from Nintendo, Fuji Film and Tokyo Electron next fall (in Japan). It allows you to take full-color pictures with a Fuji-standard digital camera and then interface its data module into the N64. The pictures can then be stored in a virtual photo album or used with the Mario Artist series. You can also just retouch them using the N64 then take them to your local photomat and have them printed on higher quality paper. The interface cartridge will set you back about $92.

We'll keep you updated on whether any of these new peripherals, all announced at Space World, will be coming to the U.S.