

Woman with the golden gun

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perfect dark is finally, finally done. egm finds out what took so dang long and whether joanna dark can fill jim bond's big shoes.

Every developer dreams of working on a game until it's finished," Mark Edmonds, Perfect Dark's producer at England-based developer Rare, told us. "We get to do that, and it works out really well for us."

Sure, but does it work out as well for Nintendo 64 owners stuck waiting for Perfect Dark, Rare's mucho-anticipated sequel to the best-selling GoldenEye 007? Nintendo pushed back PD's release so many times we feared arthritis would seriously hinder our play experience when the game was finally, finally released. And when Nintendo announced last year that Perfect Dark's shipping date was slipping again, from Christmas '99 to April 2000, we were nearly buried beneath readers' outraged letters demanding to know why.

Well, we have good news, and more good news, and even more good news, and only a tiny bit of bad news. Perfect Dark's release date is solidly locked at April 10. The extra features Rare crammed into the game—which we'll get to in a moment—are worth the wait. Perfect Dark, in every imaginable way, improves on GoldenEye. You will not be disappointed.

But let's get the bad news outta the way first. Remember the "Perfect Head" face-mapping mode Nintendo touted at 1999's E3? This revolutionary feature let you snap a pic of your noggin with your Game Boy Camera and then paste the mug shot—via the Transfer Pak—onto your multiplayer character in Perfect Dark. Unfortunately, Rare recently removed face mapping from the game. Nintendo claims the feature never worked flawlessly; even added Expansion Pak support wasn't enough to keep Perfect Dark from crashing every time testers loaded a custom head. "It's something [Rare] tried very hard to fix," said Ken Lobb, producer of Perfect Dark at Nintendo. "They didn't know how long it would take to fix. They couldn't give us a time. So we said, 'We understand. Save it for Dolphin.'"

Funny thing is, EGM editors played a few deathmatch rounds at E3 using the Perfect Head feature. The game seemed to work fine then, which makes us wonder now if maybe other, more recent social considerations are at work here. It's not hard to imagine players mapping teachers' or parents' faces onto deathmatch characters. (Heck, we ourselves planned a sidebar crammed with mugshots of desirable deathmatch foes such as Jar Jar Binks, Monica Lewinski, and Joseph Lieberman.) Perhaps Nintendo envisioned this scenario as well, considered the possible public outcry and got cold feet about the whole face mapping thing.

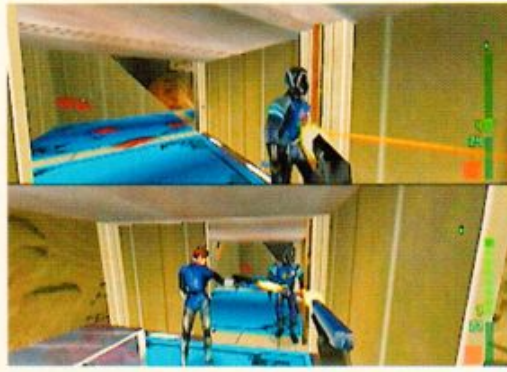
Still, when you consider the features Rare has added, the loss of Perfect Head is really no big whup. Lobb said the game was specifically delayed past Christmas so Rare could tweak the one-player story mode with two new features—a two-player cooperative option and a unique Counter-Operative mode. You heard us right: You'll be able to play through Perfect Dark's gripping story in split screen with a second

woman with the

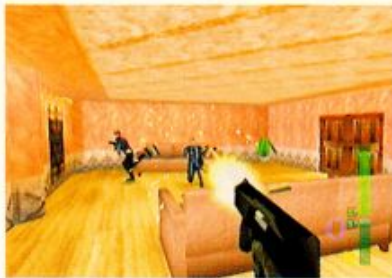
Written by Crispin Boyer
Illustrations by Allan Ditzig

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See that split-screen mode to the left? That's why you had to wait an extra four months for Perfect Dark. But seeing as how the Cooperative and Counter-operative modes will add months to PD's replay value, we figure they were worth the wait.



GoldenEye's enemies act like special-ed dropouts compared to Perfect Dark's super-smart army. Enemies'll run up and steal your weapons. They dive out of the way right when you line 'em up for a headshot. They act suitably stunned when you turn out the lights and don't night vision to hunt you in the dark. And wait 'til you go against simulants set at the Perfect or Dark skill levels. Talk about an AI nightmare.



Age: 23

Role: This British babe is so skilled at gunplay and secret-agent stuff that the Carrington Institute issued her the call sign "Perfect Dark." Nevertheless, she's still a rookie spook.

player, who'll take the role of Joanna Dark's yet-to-be named twin sister. The two of you can cover each other, pursue different objectives simultaneously, strategize and experience the complete quest and all its cinemas together. To keep the cooperative mode balanced, Rare added more enemies and gave both players a shared health bar. If one player dies and hits the Start Button to rejoin the mission, he or she will steal life from the second player. All of Perfect Dark's 21 story-mode missions can be played either by yourself or cooperatively. "So if you get to level nine and you're stuck," Lobb said, "you can call your friend over and play through it together, and then go back to playing single player if you like."

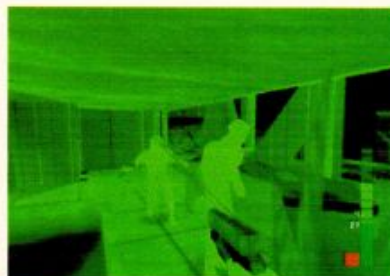
No friends? No problem. Perfect Dark also lets you play the single-player missions cooperatively with a buddy computer-controlled 'bot—or "simulant," as Rare calls them. He won't complete objectives or follow your orders, but the buddy simulant will cover your back and help you through trickier areas. You'll get the option to cooperate with up to four simulants in the single-player game as you beat the higher difficulty levels.

Perfect Dark's other innovation worth waiting for is its revolutionary Counter-operative mode. Like the cooperative game, it lets you play the one-player missions split-screen with a friend—except this time he's not on your side. One person plays Joanna Dark and tries to complete her objectives as usual. The second player jumps into the body of one of the level's bad guys, with little health or ammunition. The trick is for the counter-operative (whom level enemies ignore) to stalk Joanna and pick her off with a head shot, push furniture in front of doors to trap her in a room—anything to prevent her from completing the mission. If the counter-operative dies, he or she is immediately zapped, *The Matrix*-style, into the body of another enemy on the level. Counter-operatives can also swallow a suicide pill and

jump to a different baddie if Joanna gets too far away. "Players tend to play counter-op after they learned the levels," Lobb told us, "so they have a good idea where Joanna is. They can do things like turn and face the wall to hide, wait till Joanna fights a group of enemies then run up behind her and score a head shot."

Whether you play the main story mode alone or with a pal, we figure you'll find the missions more gripping than anything offered in past console or PC first-person shooters. Set in dreary 2023, Perfect Dark has you guiding Joanna Dark, a gifted rookie agent for the Carrington Institute, as she uncovers a conspiracy between the ominous dataDyne Corporation and a race of scaly aliens called the Skeeard. We won't give too many plot details away, but over the course of the 17 missions (plus four bonus levels) you'll help the president eject from a doomed Air Force 1; encounter a suave, mysterious enemy named Mr. Blonde; reprogram a hover taxi to crash and create a diversion; dress as a hostage negotiator to infiltrate an enemy-held island villa; and fight alongside a 3-foot-tall grey alien named Elvis. Levels are set everywhere from cramped Area 51 to snowy plains that stretch for miles. Some levels also offer multiple exit points; where you leave determines where you'll start in the next level. You'll soon learn that some entry areas are better than others.

The entire story is helped along with more than 45 minutes of cinemas packed with voice and motion-captured animation (Perfect Dark is a 32-megabyte cart, the same size as Ocarina of Time). And here's a slick little twist—you can actually interrupt cinemas at any point and start the game right where they left off. It's just an extra bit of pizzazz you'll appreciate when, say, a group of guards are looking the other way in a cinema or a character you need to save is about to be offed. Just tap a button and presto—the game jumps from cutscene to real time.





Like GoldenEye, Perfect Dark offers three difficulty levels: Agent, Secret Agent and Perfect Agent. This time, however, each skill level packs more than just extra objectives and tougher enemies. Play the Secret Agent and Perfect Agent difficulties (after beating regular Agent, Lobb suggests), and you'll find new areas in each mission you couldn't access before. Sometimes you'll even start a level in a completely different location and role. Take the villa mission, for instance. At the Agent and Secret Agent difficulties, Joanna starts the stage in a high mountain perch and must snipe several bad guys before they blow away a hostage negotiator. But at the Perfect Agent difficulty, Joanna is actually assigned to go undercover as the negotiator. Each of the three difficulties is nearly a whole different game.

Lobb told us Perfect Dark is a three- to four-times bigger game than GoldenEye. He estimated that skilled gamers can beat the Agent difficulty in about eight to 10 hours. Perfecting Perfect Agent, on the other hand, could take well over a month and is "something you can brag about," Lobb said.

Of course, no matter how good Perfect Dark's story mode may be, it's not the reason people will be playing this game a year from now. "A lot of people bought GoldenEye for the multiplayer," Edmonds said, "so we really wanted to concentrate on making better weapons and better-designed multiplayer levels. And we wanted the simulants." These AI guys are just as important to Perfect Dark as Joanna, Mr. Blonde, Elvis or any of the

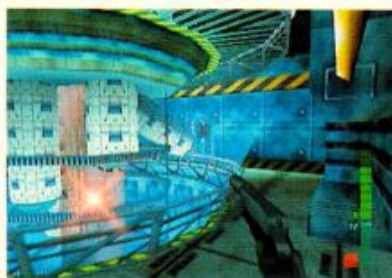
game's other stars. They come in 12 varieties (see next page), and you and three friends can play with as many as eight simulants in multiplayer mode. That makes for 12 characters wreaking havoc in one deathmatch arena at the same time (although you run into some frame-rate problems, which we'll get to in a bit).

Perfect Dark's multiplayer options are limitless. You can combine human and simulant players in any team combination. You get 19 deathmatch levels, including the Complex, Temple and Facility arenas from GoldenEye. "I guarantee after you play for a while you'll realize those three are the worst," Lobb said. "The other 16 are all better."

Rare also scrapped GoldenEye's multiplayer modes and came up with six new scenarios in addition to standard free-for-all and team deathmatching. The first mode, called Hold the Briefcase, plays like GoldenEye's Flag Tag. Players who find and carry the briefcase for 30 seconds win one point. Another mode, Hacker Central, has two objectives: Players must find a data link, then carry it to a computer and stand for 20 seconds to activate the terminal. You get Pop A Cap, a game in which players take turns as the highlighted target whom everyone else must blow away. The King of the Hill mode has everyone scrambling to control a specific area on the map. Touch that Box is a similar game, except players hunt down and tag crates to turn them their team's color. Finally, Perfect Dark offers a proper Capture-the-Flag mode, as well. Of course, Perfect Dark allows so much customization



Continued on page 148.



agent jonathan



Age: 28

Role: Also a Carrington Institute agent, Jonathan's skills are second only to Joanna's. His weapon of choice—the Magnum Revolver—comes in handy during his deep-cover missions.

Artificial Life of the Party

Perfect Dark's 12 simulants make for one rowdy crowd

We call them 'bots; Rare calls them simulants. But one thing's for sure: Perfect Dark's computer-controlled combatants are the most cunning AI guys we've ever faced—or allied with—on the consoles. As we've said, the game lets you and three friends play with as many as eight simulants at once, in any team configuration you like (Ken Lobb prefers to play with four players, each teaming with a simulant ally, thus making four teams of two).

But here's the wild part: PD's motley crew of sims comes in a multitude of "personalities," 12 in all (see illustrations), from which you can choose in multiplayer's Advanced Setup menu.

And as if that weren't enough variety, you can assign each simulant a difficulty setting that determines his level of deathmatching skill. You get six levels—Meat, Easy, Normal, Hard, Perfect and Dark. "My advice is if you play with sims, play with Normals," Lobb said. "It's like playing against a human. You'll never say, 'Damn! That guy cheated!'" On the other hand, Hard-, Perfect- and Dark-level sims cheat, he told us. They'll rotate faster than you, move quicker and aim better. In fact, Lobb said that, in some scenarios, it's impossible for four human players to beat just one Dark sim.

With 12 sim types to choose from and six

difficulties for each, Perfect Dark delivers more than 70 "bot variations in all. But just because they got strong personalities doesn't mean they're above taking orders. By holding A and tapping one of the C buttons, you can issue simple commands—such as "follow me" or "kill PacifistSim"—to particular simulants on your team. Or you can hold the R Button to apply the same order to all your AI squadmates. We've heard this feature may not make it into the final version. Regardless, you're going to be working closely with these guys in PD; you'd might as well get to know them now.



Name: **normalsim**

Personality: No special fetishes here. Just like any human player, all NormalSim cares about is shooting enemies and living to see payday.

Name: **Pacifistsim**

Personality: He thinks guns are evil, so he runs around the level and tries to collect all of them, never firing a single shot. Players get stuck waiting for weapons to respawn, unless they take matters into their own hands. "When you kill PacifistSim—boom!—all the weapons come flying out of him," Lobb said. "It's like Christmas."



Name: **Reveragesim**

Personality: The game's most dangerous simulant, RevengeSim hunts down the last person who gave him grief. "If you kill RevengeSim and you have a 20-minute game," Lobb said, "he's gonna be killing you for the next 19 minutes. Until someone else kills him. Then he's like, 'Oh, you want some of me now?'"



Name: **vendettasim**

Personality: This guy picks one enemy target at random, then hunts him 'til he's dead.

Name: **cowardsim**

Personality: Sometimes it's better to run and fight another day. But for Cowardsim, that sometime is, well, all the time.





Name: **Predatorsim**

Personality: Schwarzenegger and Danny Glover know all about these guys, who like to stay cloaked and shielded.



Name: **Turtlesim**

Personality: He's not fast, but he's not stupid. TurtleSim likes to hide in corners and fire up his shields.

Name: **cheetasim**

Personality: Him CheetaSim. Him real fast.



Name: **Fistsim**

Personality: Guns? Who needs 'em. Not FistSim, who prefers hand-to-hand chopsocky.



Name: **kamikazesim**

Personality: The simulant with a death wish, he'll run at you with guns blazing no matter what weapon you're blasting in his direction.



Name: **shieldsim**

Personality: As if this sim's love of shields doesn't make him hard enough to kill, he's got extra health, too.

Name: **Rocketsim**

Personality: Rocket launchers are this guy's weapon du'jour.



daniel carrington



Age: 62

Role: He's a kindly old scientist who founded the Carrington Institute to distribute gee-whiz technologies to the world at large. He also directs the CI's agents from a computer link in his office.



Continued from page 143.

that these modes are only the beginning of what you and three pals can do in the game (see sidebar below).

Nintendo and Rare know many gamers bought GoldenEye just for the multiplayer mode; they've built Perfect Dark so deathmatch-happy gamers can ignore the one-player story if they want. "You can just play multiplayer," Lobb said. "It'll allow you to open all the levels. You can get all the weapons. You can open all the stuff that's involved in multiplayer. You don't have to touch the one-player game."

You earn access to more weapons, levels

and game types by completing Perfect Dark's 30 Challenges, special missions that work like the trials in Turok: Rage Wars. So, when you first switch on Perfect Dark, you'll find only a few deathmatch levels, five simulant types, basic weaponry and the standard free-for-all deathmatch. But, "every time you play a new challenge, it's something you haven't seen before," Lobb said. "You beat that challenge, you open its [arena] for multiplayer. You beat a certain type of simulant, you get that simulant. You find certain types of weapons in that challenge, you get those weapons in multiplayer." Better still, you can play these

do-it-yourself deathmatching

think you can build a better game than rare? give it a shot.

Inventive gamers—the kind who contrived a million-and-one multiplayer scenarios for GoldenEye—will fall to their knees and give thanks to the deathmatch gods for Perfect Dark. This thing gives you complete control over every conceivable multiplayer option. Selecting the Advanced Setup header in the Combat Simulator menu opens an unprecedented number of settings and submenus. Once you choose the arena and game type (Capture the Flag, King of the Hill, etc.), you can visit other menus to enable one-hit kills, disable the radar, turn off auto-aim,



and pick fast- or slow-motion movement.

Advanced Setup also lets you choose which simulants will join your game, their personality types and level of difficulty. Then you can assign all the human and AI players in any team configuration you can think of. Finally, you have complete freedom to place whatever weapons and gadgets you like into the arena (or you can simply choose GoldenEye-style presets like Power Weapons, Grenade Launchers, etc.). The custom-weapon panel consists of six slots. Whatever weapon or gizmo you assign to slot number one will spawn in more locations within the level than anything else. Items assigned to slot number six, on the other hand, will be the hardest to find, spawning only in one location.

If all these menus and options set your head spinnin', don't worry. Everything's laid out in a logical order. And here's the best part: you can name and save your custom scenario to a Memory Pak. So, say you spend an hour designing what is surely the most ingenious deathmatch mode of all time, you can slap it on your Pak, stick it in your pocket and haul it to a pal's house, where you

hopefully won't get schooled in the scenario you just devised. Or you could use your DexDrive to post it on the Net (we can't wait to see the Web site subculture that sprouts up around this game).

Every Nintendo tester we talked to proudly boasted of their favorite handmade scenario. And that's what makes the Advances Setup menus so incredible—they force you to experiment, to invent games maybe no one else has thought of. Perfect Dark comes with a few preset scenarios to start you off, and here are five of our own to help get your creative juices pumpin'...

that's my shotgun!

The setup: In the Custom-Weapons Panel, place the shotgun in slot six, so it only appears in one spawn location. Place shields (PD's version of the bullet-proof vest) in slot three, so they spawn more often. Set the win limit to one-kill wins.

The game: In this chaotic scenario, everyone's frantic to find the shotgun, since they only need to kill one person to win. At



challenges with as many as three people.


Perfect Dark packs the largest arsenal ever seen in a console shooter. You'll eventually find more than 44 weapons and gadgets, and each one has a secondary function you access by holding the B button. Notable boomsticks include the Laptop Gun, which transforms into a sentry turret you can mount on walls. The Dragon machine gun is especially fun, since it becomes a proximity mine in its secondary mode. ("People see the Dragon lying on the ground," Lobb said. "They pick it up and boom! Nothing's more satisfying." And then you have the future-cool gadgets like remote camera probes that let you spy on enemies in other rooms, as well as night-vision goggles you can use to stalk enemies after you switch off the lights.

As you'd expect, most weapons produce spectacular effects. In fact, all of Perfect Dark's visuals are a step above GoldenEye's. Still, the version we played suffered sluggish frame-rates in the co-op and multiplayer modes. Nintendo assured us that Rare is smoothing out the sluggish gameplay, and the final version will be more than playable. "Basically, if you pick a level and go with four



players and two simulants, the frame-rate's fine," Lobb said. "Four players with four simulants is probably OK in 14 of the 19 levels. Some of the levels actually work OK with four players and eight computer guys."

You don't need the Expansion Pak to play Perfect Dark, but you'll want it. Without the Pak, you can't have more than two players in any of the multiplayer modes. The Pak also lets you play in hi-res, although "hi-res is really good for two-player multiplayer," Lobb said. "Above that I would advise you turn hi-res off or the frame-rate suffers."

Tiny problems like this aside, Perfect Dark really is a game that's been lovingly crafted until the developers were finished—unlike so many other titles that seem rushed and fall short of their potential. We haven't even covered all of PD's features, stuff like the firing range that lets you practice every weapon in the game or the myriad hard-to-find secrets (score five head shots in a row on one level, for example, and you'll earn a special weapon). Fear not, however. The game's nearly here. Get in line April 10 and you'll finally experience first-person perfection for yourself. 

cassandra de vries



Age: 39

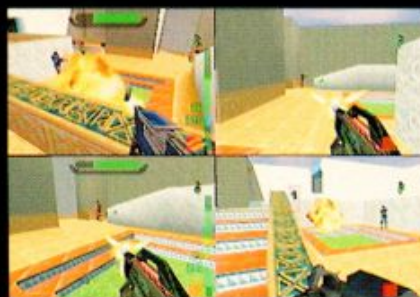
Role: Dan Carrington's archnemesis, Cassandra serves as head of the shadowy dataDyne Corporation, where she connives unscrupulous plans to topple her competition. In other words, she's one power-hungry bitch.

the same time, anyone on the wrong side of the shotgun is scrambling for armor and trying to steal the weapon away with his/her Disarm Attack (the punch's secondary function). Incidentally, Nintendo product evaluator Armond Williams Jr. gave us this idea, and it may wind up as a preset scenario in the game.

save the president

The setup: Select one CowardSim, give him the body of the president who appears in the one-player game and put him on your team of four human players. Then choose three or four KamikazeSims and make them the opposing team.

The game: In this variation of a classic



GoldenEye custom scenario, the Coward simulant on your team serves as the president, whom all the human players must protect from the marauding KamikazeSims. Play for time instead of kill limits; try to keep the prez alive for the entire game. It won't be easy, since the easily spooked CowardSim runs from every threat. All human players will need to keep pace with the president and act as human shields while shooting back at the Kamikazes. Disable radar to make things extra exciting.

farsighted

The setup: Stick the FarSight XR-20 in slot number one, so it spawns nearly everywhere, then choose a large level filled with small rooms. Build a team of three simulants to battle your group of human players. Throw whatever other guns you like into the vacant weapon slots.

The game: As soon as the game starts, all the human players need to grab FarSights and meet up in one of the level's rooms (you should all agree on a meeting room before you kick off the scenario). Then, standing back-to-back, everyone needs to pick off the simulant enemies from afar, with the FarSight, before the sims find your team's room and slaughter the lot of you with their close-range weapons.

see no evil

The setup: Slap cloaking devices into slot number one and IR goggles into slot six. Put whatever other weapons you like in the remaining slots. You can play this free-for-all mode against any combination of human and sim opponents.

The game: Combatants will find cloaking devices everywhere, so they'll probably spend most of the game invisible. Whoever finds the rare IR goggles—which let you see cloaked enemies—will have a definite edge.

suicide squad

The setup: Pit you and three friends against one or more NormalSims set at the Perfect or Dark difficulties.

The game: This is a game of survival. Simulants set at Perfect level or higher can score a headshot on you faster than you can slide your finger up to the R Button. "You'll need to strategize as a team to beat one or two of these guys," Ken Lobb said, "and it makes for a whole different game." His advice: Band together in an easily defendable room and set up Laptop sentry guns—lots of them—to mount a defense. And don't forget to pull the laptops off the wall to reload 'em when they run dry.