

Did you know that *Donkey Kong Country* is called *Super Donkey Kong* in Japan?

Even inconsequential stuff, like Kong's rope-swinging animation is superb – he actually stretches out from the vine as it swings back.

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY



After more trumpeting than you'd get following an 18 hour curry-eating marathon, the heralded 'saviour of the

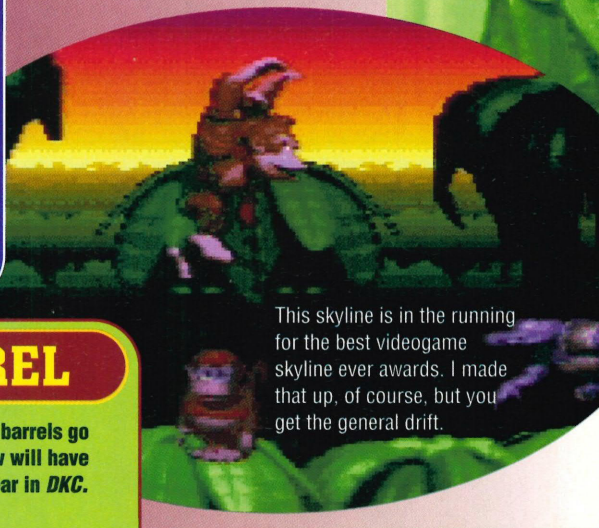
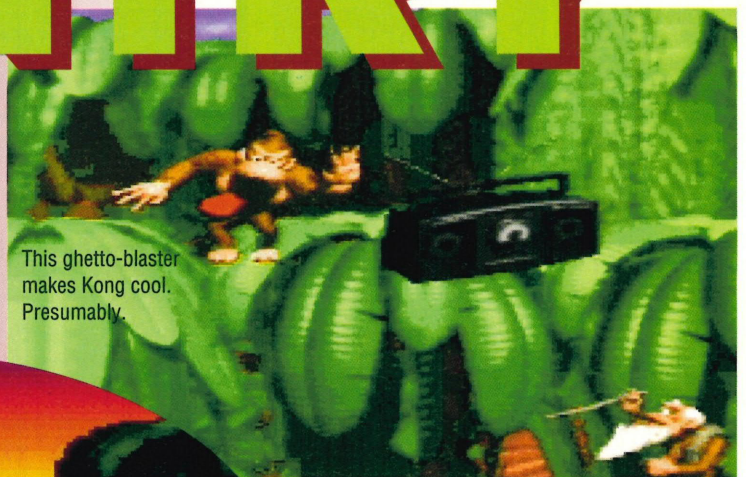
16-bit era' is finally here...

UK Release

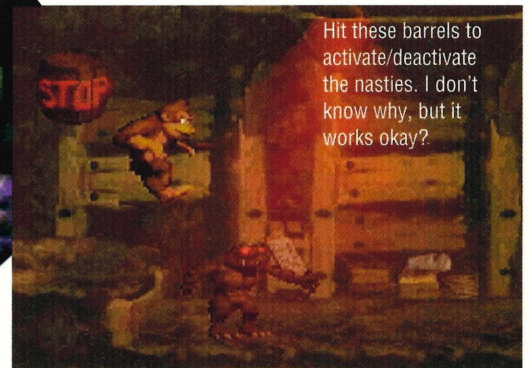


Game: Donkey Kong Country
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Rareware
Price: £59.99 (incl limited edition CD)
Release: December
Players: 1 or 2 alternatively
Cart ROM: 32 Mbit
Adaptor: PAL only

This ghetto-blaster makes Kong cool. Presumably.



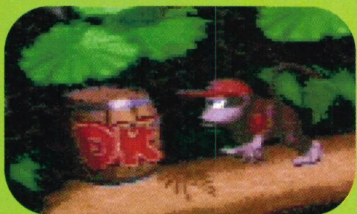
This skyline is in the running for the best videogame skyline ever awards. I made that up, of course, but you get the general drift.



Hit these barrels to activate/deactivate the nasties. I don't know why, but it works okay?

OVER A BARREL

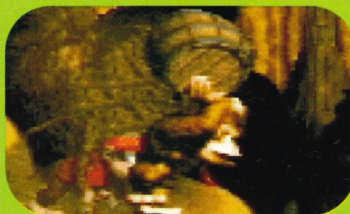
You'll already know that *Donkey Kong* and barrels go together like bananas and custard, but few will have suspected how much importance they'd bear in *DKC*.



You'll see these all over the place, with good reason – your partner is inside.



These aren't nearly as common. They act as restart points. Ignore the stars.



And 'ere's yer bog standard barrel guv, suitable for knocking over nasties' heads.



You can't quite see what's happening here, but this is a cannon barrel. Yes it is.

Throughout the game, Kong teams up with like-minded animal chums, each offering assistance in a very different, but always vitally useful fashion.

RAMBI THE RHINO



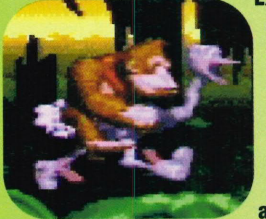
Hop astride this hard-hided horny beast to steamroller anything in your path. He can also smash open secret entrances to bonus areas.

ENGUARDE THE SWORDFISH



The only self intelligent animal in the game in as much as he'll attack enemies who come close by without any prompting from the player.

EXPRESSO THE OSTRICH



Expresso can't fly (obviously) and although he can't jump on enemies because of his spindly legs, his ability to run and leap like the wind are unmatched.

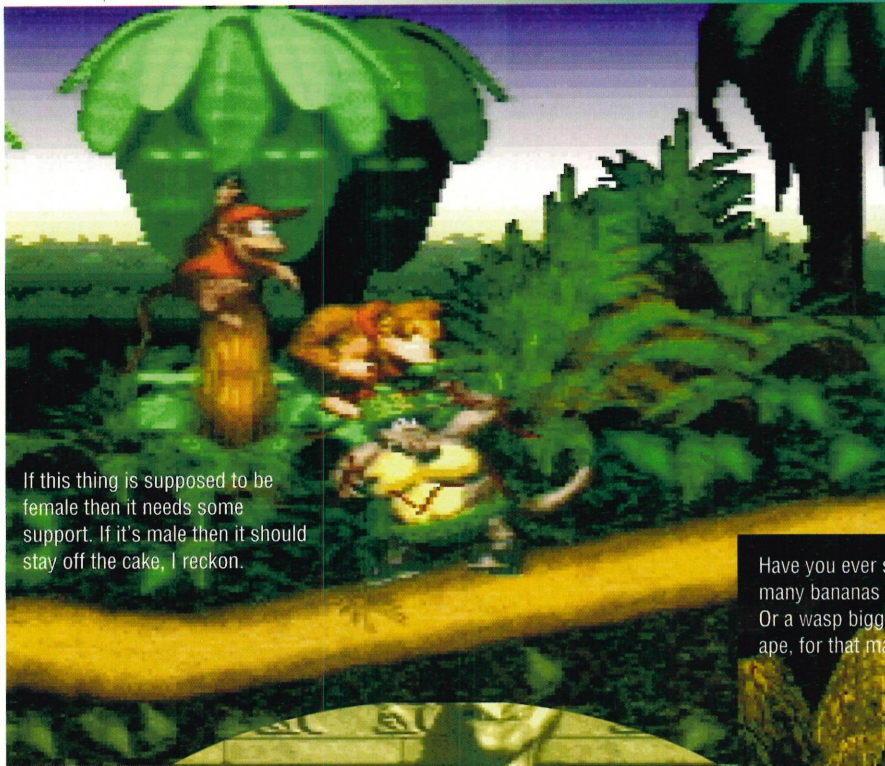
WINKY THE FROG



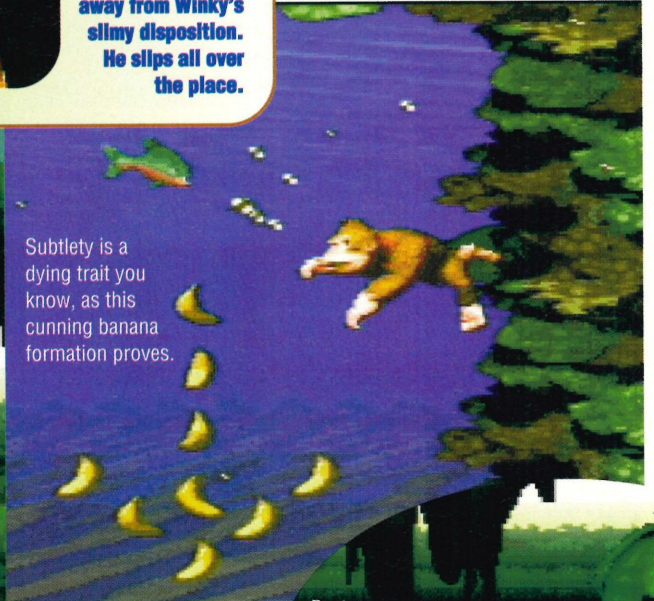
However well suited to bouncing on enemies from a great height, there's no getting away from Winky's slimy disposition. He slips all over the place.



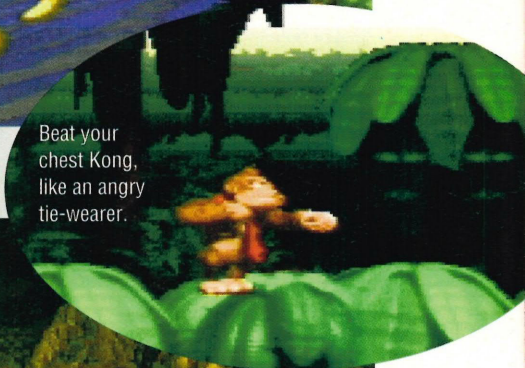
Shall I tell you about Squawky the parrot? He carries a lamp that shines a cone of light ahead of you in one of the game's cleverer sections. But our grabs have corrupted, so here's Rambi again.



If this thing is supposed to be female then it needs some support. If it's male then it should stay off the cake, I reckon.

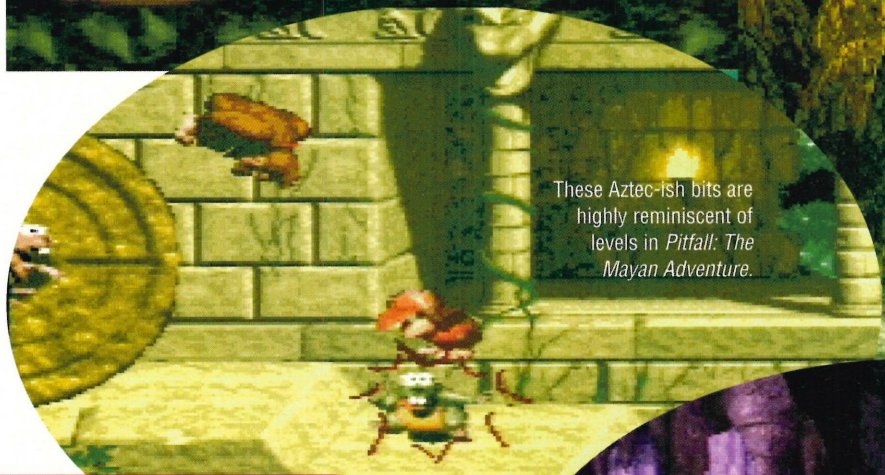


Subtlety is a dying trait you know, as this cunning banana formation proves.

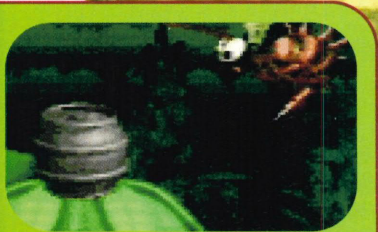


Beat your chest Kong, like an angry tie-wearer.

Have you ever seen so many bananas in one place? Or a wasp bigger than an ape, for that matter?



These Aztec-ish bits are highly reminiscent of levels in *Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure*.



These contain pints of 'pop' and make you go wobbly. Or you can roll on them.



The scene underneath Donkey Kong's hut is not a pretty one, but it's no use staring: those bananas have gone, left, vanished, disappeared, vamoosed. This is obviously something of a low point in the life of a simple primate.

Above: Squawks the Parrot holds a torch for Kong, bless his feathers.

Right: Orangutans turn the tables on the Kong boys by rolling barrels at them. The swines.

ZY SAYS...

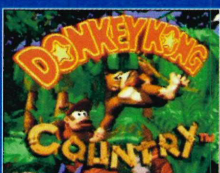
'Nice graphics', as Shigeru Miyamoto said of *DKC* rather ambiguously. There are mixed feelings on my part too, I must admit. You're probably aware that many other games magazines and programmes have already scored *DKC* in the high nineties, calling it the greatest thing ever. We can't help feeling they've fallen for the hype, and know for certain that some of them can't have played it for very long. Here on *Splay* we tend to be very sceptical of such things, and in *DKC's* case I think we've been proved right. Like us, you'll gasp at the best bits: but you'll also groan with disappointment at things like the dull, dull, dull bonus levels.

Whilst it provides most of the things you expect from a good platformer – a fast pace, hidden areas, big levels –

you're constantly reminded that more effort has gone into the appearance than the level design. Worse, *DKC* treads a lot of old ground without any sign of creative improvement or new ideas. Speedy mine-cart sections? Slippy-slidey ice-worlds?

Donkey Kong is a good game, no doubt about it: its lush graphics and tough challenge will keep many players happy throughout the festive season. But it isn't the best game you'll ever play, it's certainly not the best game on the SNES, and you'll be mightily disappointed if you were hoping for *Mario V*. Expect, instead, another reasonable platformer with breathtaking graphics and you'll have a Merry Christmas.

GOOD, BAD OR UGLY?



The effect of an pre-publicity campaign the like of which *Donkey Kong Country* has enjoyed is not to be sniffed at. Ever since the game made its debut at the CES, along with the now notorious Howard Lincoln speech, it's picked up an almost mythical reputation. So now it's here we can answer the question: is it, as has been repeatedly claimed, the best game ever?

No. It's not even the best platform game ever – that award is still shared between *Super Mario World* and *Super Mario Brothers 3*. Ironically, it can't be the greatest platform game ever partly because of those Silicon Graphics-rendered visuals. Bear with me.

The beauty of *Mario's* finest titles is their marriage of playability, simplicity and design. *Donkey Kong Country* can't compete in these areas because everything is on a larger scale. Meaning that you don't get as much game environment on-screen at any particular moment, and individual platforms are jumbo sized. In making everything beautiful, the game's complexity has been restricted. The pixel-perfect manoeuvres asked of you in *SMW*, for example, won't be

called for here – they can't be because the actual platforms and objects themselves are less clearly defined. It's more akin to something like *The Jungle Book* or *Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure* in this respect – gameplay occasionally feels fluffy, and not as precise as *Super Mario World*. It's something which I had to learn, after considerable play, to become quite content with.

Unlike the game's other nuances (which I'm still not at all content with) there are, in the early levels, too many leaps of faith, made necessary because of the scrolling which doesn't always reveal player-relevant parts of the game in a just-what-exactly-is-lying-in-wait-for-me-in-that-section-below-w-hich-I-can't-quite-see? kind of way.

Put simply, this isn't the sort of game to come out of one of Nintendo's R&D teams in Japan. Look with a magnifying glass and you'll see the hallmarks of British game design. Even the game's supposedly original sections, such as the 'stop-go' cave levels are based on ideas which were first seen in platform games years ago.

Good things? It's a pleasantly difficult challenge. The soundtrack swings from fine (the upbeat track in the plane section) to listenable in its own right (the perfectly

GO APE!

It's hard to consider this a 'free gift' when you've handed over sixty notes, but Nintendo is promoting initial sales of *DKC* with a CD sweetener of music by Primal Scream, Oasis, PWEI, The Boo Radleys, St Etienne, Terrorvision, Radiohead and Ride. It's very well done, especially when you consider how it might have turned out (you know Nintendo – we could have got M-People and Roxette). I can't see that anybody's purchasing decision will be swayed

by the addition of this freebie, though: a compilation of album tracks rather than original recordings, there's no new material for fans and little rarity value. It's simply a tidy toe-tapping taste of indie-pop, and that's no bad thing.

Coincidentally, Zy was at university with the *NME's* Johnny Cigarettes. They didn't like each other very much.



Even more bananas and a vulture called Necky. He's the end-of-level boss found in the first section.

calming tones during underwater levels). And the graphics are even better than they look here. In fact, the game will sell more off the back of the way its looks than anything else – in exactly the same way *Starfox* did.

I realise I've sounded negative throughout this review, but when you're handed the 'best thing ever' on a velvet cushion it's subject to more scrutiny than would normally be necessary. It's simple: some games live up to their hype, some don't. *Donkey Kong Country* doesn't. Quite.

● Tony Mott

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
96%	89%	87%
GAMELIFE	OVERALL SCORE:	90%
90%		

VERDICT: A fine game in its own right, and everyone who buys it will be pleased with it. But not as pleased as they might well have expected.