

PREVIOUSLY IN N64 We Future Looked *Buck Bumble* back in issue 14.

**TRAININGSPOTTING**

A definite 'plus' point for *Buck Bumble* is its well-considered training mode. Gentle and oh-so-mindful of the novice player's potentially delicate nerves, it introduces basic gameplay concepts with friendly text messages and small, easy-to-negotiate areas. Although we didn't actually take a look until, ahem, we'd reached around level 14 or 15, it's actually rather good.



Buck, who's bumbling around a bit here, blows an enemy to bits. Look at the fogging. There's no viewing distance at all.



Explosions aplenty as Buck buzzes into a world of hurt.

Something nasty this way comes. A bright light, a rumble of thunder and things go boss-shaped. Ooooh.



# BUCK BUMBLE



Heard of beat-'em-ups, yes? Ubi Soft's latest, intriguingly, is a bee-'em-up...

<b>Buck Bumble</b>			
UBI SOFT			
	October	96M	1/2
		Controller Pak	Bridge back Rumble Pak
£50			

**B**uck Bumble's eponymous hero is no ordinary, pollen-gathering fatty. He's a cyborg, created to combat the armies of The Herd – a 'nation' of insects mutated by toxic waste dumped by uncaring humans. In *real* terms, this makes for approximately 22 levels of mission-based shoot-'em-up. With free 360 degree movement, 11 different weapons and a range of garden-based locales, *Buck Bumble* is an odd game, but it's difficult to explain quite *why*.

It's hard to fathom just who *Buck Bumble* is aimed at. A cursory glance at its plot premise and a few screenshots would suggest that it's a title designed with the younger N64 owner in mind. This, however, is not the case. It's not the hardest of games, but the control method takes a bit of getting used to, and there are times when it requires players to have the patience of a saint. Which leaves the 'one for the kids' theory knackered. So who, exactly, *will* *Buck Bumble* appeal to? Let's go have a look, shall we?

# Doom buggies

With *Buck Bumble* being a shoot-'em-up, it goes without saying that there are more than a few hazards on hand to tax the player's reflexes. Early levels are populated by Craneflys and the Wasp MK1, which are relatively easy to dispatch once their

attack patterns are committed to memory. Later stages introduce the likes of the Giz Beetle, Killapilla, Dragonfly and floating proximity mines. Here's a choice selection, in all their evil, bee-heating glory...

## BUZZ WORDS

It's a hard life, being both a videogames reviewer *and* a guileless, witless simpleton. A game like *Buck Bumble* provides an awful temptation to use dreadful puns and obscure references.

Were it not for the fact that Andrea would have punched me in the face if I'd included them.

Those of a delicate disposition would probably have been offended by the following: 'To 'bee', or not to 'bee?'; that is the question,' (discarded review conclusion) Buck B. Goode (same again, but worse), 'Let it 'bee', Honey, I Shrunk The Killapilla, the 'Famous Bucks of Our Time' box-out (featuring Buck Roders and half the cast of *Watership Down*. Think about it.), *Bee Movie* (a box-out about *BB*'s plot and introductory sequence), 'I've never *Been* so annoyed in my life! Why those... *Beep! Beep!*' (a tirade against Argonaut's decision *not* to include a password system. The boundaries) and *Bee Bee See* (a box on views offered in the, ahem, two-player mode.) There are more. Why not write in and annoy James by contributing your own?

## giz beetle

A nasty little swine, these acid-firing critters are usually found in packs. If you're a sharp-shooter, you can pick them off from high altitude, where they're unable to hit Buck.



## transporter

Easy meat for Buck's explosive weaponry. Aim for the head, and the resultant blast sees this large nasty explode convincingly. Be sure to avoid getting caught by the debris, though.



## killapilla

First encountered on level five, the Killapilla *can* be sniped at from a distance, if you have the patience and ammo to spare. Get too close, and they'll slaughter you with their plasma cannons.



## wasp mk1

These fast-moving insects home in on Buzz once he flies within their range, making fast dive-bomb attacks. With a few attack patterns in their repertoire, these are particularly dangerous in groups.



## cranefly

Craneflys are good for target practice, and little else. They have no weapons to speak of and often hover motionless. They'll only damage Buck if, foolishly, he collides with them.



## mine

These hover in set positions, usually blocking the entrance to a new garden area. They can be shot down with ease, but it's best to do so from a distance – the resultant blast is pretty large.



▽ First-person (or as good as) perspective. Allows more precise aiming.



△ A garden. Or, at least, it's muddy and it's got a wall.

△ Ka-boom! Buck sorts out the hosepipe ban.

△ A boss gets it. Looks like the bees knees, this bit. (Wacca)



# GARDENER'S WORLD

What better way to communicate *Buck Bumble*'s more salient features than a huge, 28-grab walkthrough of its Radar Run level? So here it is.

**1** This is the start of the mission. Buck's task, should he choose to accept it – fortunately, he hasn't got much else on – is to destroy three radar dishes



**2** A locked portal prevents Buck from travelling further. However, a quick scout around the door reveals a likely-looking cable running to a nearby building...

**3** Having shot the building, Buck observes the pipeline exploding section by section, until it arrives outside the closed access hatch...



**4** It's open! Thought, eh? It's a wonderful thing. And brains! Brilliant!



**5** Peeking through into the area beyond, Buck spies a number of patrolling Craneflies. They're fairly harmless, but an inkling of an idea forms...



**6** Heh heh heh. With a quick tap of an infinite weaponry cheat, a Cranefly gets a Guided Missile in the chops. Of course, such fancy guns aren't available this early,



but we thought we'd show them off. So it's like two review bits in one, yeah?

**7** These floating collectables are worth points. Buck can collect them quite easily if he's hurrying to get quick finish bonus points, as they're nicely lined up in an arc.



**8** The first radar. Out with the big guns, then? Well, not just yet. Being careful and conscientious, Buck sets off to



clear the immediate area of Craneflies.

**9** For those playing this level without the benefit of Buck's full arsenal, there's a thoughtfully-provided rocket launcher in the shadow of the radar.

You can blow it up with his basic laser, but it's better (and quicker) with explosives.

**10** You'll need a



few hits to get it going...

**11** Just up from the now-smoking radar debris, there's a ledge with ammo for one of Buck's guns. It's always worthwhile checking such nooks and crannies as, more



often than not, such inquisitive behaviour reaps dividends.

**12** Just off down the garden, a squadron of wasps attack. One good way to combat these, especially when they're attacking from different



directions, is to place Buck's back against a wall or some other solid object. This cuts the available angles of attack



to a manageable 180 degree radius.

**13** If you're brave, you can simply pick them off in the open, like the gung-ho hero you doubtlessly are. Their attack patterns are fairly

**A BUM NOTE...** Life's hard when you're a military-issue bee and, of all things, your arse is coloured like a bulls-eye. Sigh...



**L**ylat Wars is, as you all know, a fine update of a classic SNES game, *Starfox*. So, when the development company responsible for *Starfox* – veteran coders Argonaut – announced an N64 title called *Buck Bumble*, we looked beyond the dodgy name to the potentially infinite promise of the then-unknown game beyond. As you do. But *Buck Bumble*, alas, is only 'mildly entertaining' rather than 'hellishly addictive', 'visually average' as opposed to 'aesthetically ace', and 'questionably anthropomorphic' rather than 'aww, in't the ickle bee cute?' So: disappointing, then. But not, necessarily, a disaster.

A fair indication of any game's true worth – with very few exceptions, sadly – is the reaction it evokes when you first see it. *Buck Bumble*, being a mission-based shoot-'em-up that sees a cyborg bee take on hordes of mutant insects, isn't immediately appealing for a variety of different reasons. Perseverance, however, reveals more than a modicum of playability, despite its, shall we say, many obvious flaws.

Each level begins with Buck receiving a specific assignment: from simple 'find this, shoot that' objectives to 'unlock these, then find this, shoot that'. 'Finding' and 'shooting' are, you may be guessing, the core of *Buck Bumble*'s gameplay. Fortunately, there are a few surprises

thrown in for good measure. Around midway through one early sortie, for example, Buck is charged with the task of carrying a primed nuclear weapon to a safe detonation point before its timer expires. Complete all required actions on any given stage, and it's on to the next level.

The various assailants that Buck meets on his travels are a varied bunch. Individually, there are few – if any – creatures capable of troubling even the least talented player. But the further you get through the game, the more their numbers increase. Dive-bombing wasps, Pulse Laser-toting Dragonflies and water-based Killapillas – to name but three examples – become particularly dangerous once their individual bee-bashing talents

predictable, but while you're aiming at one, watch out for others approaching, unseen, from other angles...

**14** Another locked portal, and a hazardous expanse of water (Buck drowns immediately should he fall into a liquid). So where does that pipe go?



**15** Aha! Another one of those 'door-keeper-locker' things. Whatever they may be called. Judicious use of firepower on aforementioned building leads to...



**16** ...This pipe exploding off into the distance, much like the last one. And, again, it's heading towards the door. There's a pattern emerging, you know.



are combined. For Buck to survive each mission, players often need to clear areas steadily, taking on a few rivals at a time.

**VISUALS**  **Its reliance on fogging – 'misty English gardens' is probably the explanation – makes certain, larger areas look dreadful.**

Such a playing technique slows *Buck Bumble's* gameplay down a notch or five, but there's really no other way to play it. Attempting to fly straight through to the mission objective without engaging incidental nasties rarely leads to success – especially during certain missions, like level

6's bomb drop, with Buck carrying volatile explosives – and, even if players can achieve such a feat, they'll certainly miss

out on countless weapons, points and other such goodies.

Buck is hardly defenceless, however. With ten weapons to collect and a body-mounted laser with infinite ammo, players can progress from simple rapid-fire gun pick-ups to homing missiles and scatter

bombs. Certain sections of his armoury are better suited to dispatching certain assailants, but they're all means by which the same ends are achieved. To be honest, it's often an arbitrary choice of which visual effect best tickles your fancy, but you can't knock the amount of hardware on offer.

Collecting weapons is a simple case of finding 'bubble' pick-ups, with an image of the object contained floating inside. These can be found at pre-set locations, or at a position where Buck has destroyed a particular insect. Other pick-ups include points bonuses – which do, to quote dear Brucey, make prizes: an extra life for every 10,000 – and energy, which becomes increasingly scarce the further you get.

**VOICE OF THE BEEHIVE**

Without a shadow of a doubt, *Buck Bumble* has some of the worst intro music we've ever heard in the game. It could be described as 'jungle trance' (though we really wouldn't want to commit ourselves), with some reggae bloke singing over the top. Regardless, it's a real stinker. Bring back *Wipeout*, eh?



**17** Through the portal lies the second radar. But if you squint into the distance, you can see a number of wasps. Better get rid of those first, hey?

**18** Buck's a bit battered after that last frank exchange of views with his insect chums. Fortunately, he can replenish energy by



collecting little droplets of nectar, usually from plants like the one pictured above. Yum.



**19** That's supposed to be a wheelbarrow, just in case you're wondering. But what lies inside?

**20** Goodies! Three pick-ups in total, including an ever-helpful energy bead. This type restore Buck's energy bar to its maximum extent.



**21** There's no apparent entrance to another area, but there is this strange construction lying on the ground here. Can it be blown up? Of course it can.



**22** ...And there's a passageway underneath. So might did make right in this instance.

**23** Through the tunnel, a message pops up asking Buck to destroy the weevils in this area. They're a hardy bunch, however, and return fire with their heavy-duty cannons. The best way to pick them off is to attack from behind and above.



**24** Having blown the weevils to whatever temporal or ethereal plane insects are supposed to go when they die.



Buck's way forward is revealed by a newly-opened portal.

**25** There's a huge water pool here. On it, there are two lily pads with power-ups floating above them. Buck skids when he lands at speed, so it's important not to slip off the edge and into the pool...

**26** A teleport machine is the exit to the last area. But it's heavily defended by three proximity mines and a gaggle of Giz Beetles. This is where the cluster bombs found on the lily pad come in handy...



**27** Through the teleport is the final radar and a new building. This spawns Giz Beetles. It's not essential that you blow it up, but every point counts, yes?



**28** And the last radar bites the dust! As soon as the smoke clears, Buck is teleported away from the level. But that rather begs the question: if his unseen



supervisors can do that at the end of a level, why can't they do it when he's fallen into some water? Or has several wasps on his tail? The chimps.

**29** Buck's score and a save option. The bonus score total is zero because the level wasn't done fast enough. If you want to prove your worth, go back and do it in an ultra-fast time...



**LOOP-BEE-LOOP**

Although *Buck* can't strafe – which makes *Turok*-style blasting techniques redundant, dammit – he can execute a handy loop-the-loop to escape pressing insects. He's a tricky fellow to control at first, with his propensity for losing altitude at the drop of a hat without careful analogue stick adjustments. But, with practice, the curse rate reduces as the subtleties of the system become evident. Soon, you too will believe that a bee can fly as, according to the laws of physics, they actually *can't* – or so I was told. Which is a bit of a puzzle. If there is a god, he's – as I write – probably chuckling wildly as he balances a bucket of custard precariously above Einstein's bedroom door...



# Two bee do bee do



△ Roll the football and help yourself to victory pie.

*Buck Bumble*, surprisingly, has two multiplayer options, both supporting competitive play between a couple of pad-toting rivals. The first, known as the Buck Battle mode, is a relatively straightforward deathmatch-style game, with both players traversing one of five specific levels in a mission to righteously slay their opposite number. It's rather tricky – and matches can last for ages, given the generous energy allocations – but the concept of an airborne one-on-one is refreshingly unique in N64 software circles. It's not a perfect deathmatch – four players would have been nice, or some kind of system whereby players three and four act as marksmen for pilots one and two – but we like it all the same.

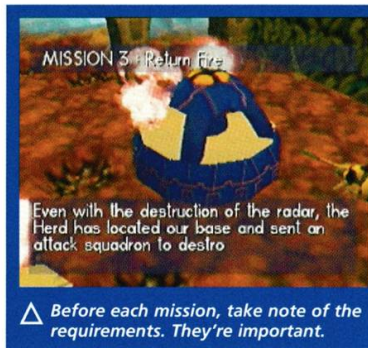
The second is rather less appealing, but no less interesting as a concept. Called Buck Ball, it sees both players attempt to steer a large, ponderous ball into their opponent's goal. You can shoot it, or bump into it, but the sphere's rather slow-moving. A little more pace, thought and features could probably result in the basic idea behind it maturing into a game in its own right. How's about it, Argonaut?



Getting through each level is, combat aside, often a simple case of finding key parts, or shooting a certain pre-set point, thus opening doors leading to the target proper. Occasionally, a hint of a crack on a wall section reveals, after laser-based pummelling, a secret area. And that, subtleties and the odd level-specific variations aside, is pretty much your lot.

*Buck Bumble* is, as the above text relates, a pretty simple game to get to grips with. It's not, however, a technical tour-de-force. Visually, it's unremarkable. The majority of play takes place in gardens, so there's the occasional flower pot, spade or wheelbarrow. But those objects aside, the stages don't look *much* like the rural plots they're supposed to be.

It's not necessarily an 'ugly' game, but *Buck Bumble* rarely, if ever, impresses. Worse, its reliance on fogging – 'misty English gardens' is probably the official excuse... ahem, explanation – makes certain, larger areas look dreadful.



△ Before each mission, take note of the requirements. They're important.



△ Soaring the heights and depths of the garden Buck fires off a few friendly rounds of death.

◁ Things get a bit frantic as Bumble Boy heads for the hill top with huge guns at the ready.

a life playing *Buck Bumble*, you do wonder if it is, and why the hell you're bothering to try once more. If, like us, you intend to collect every item, visit every secret area and aim for the completist ideal, there's nothing worse than being asked to play the entire level over again – and, often, with the end in sight. It just seems needlessly draconian. *Mario 64* can get away with it because, hey, it's *Mario 64* – and, after all, it *does* give you several alternatives to any one level you may be stuck on...

*Buck Bumble* is average in too many ways. Playable yet unspectacular, and rather workmanlike in execution, it's a pleasant enough way to while away a few hours. But 'bee'-riliant? Hardly.

JAMES PRICE

**VISUALS 5**

The fog's awful – a right pea souper, and no mistake, gov'ner – and the wall textures could be a little more varied.

**SOUNDS 6**

Its annoying (but clever) theme tune will plague your brain for days.

**MASTERY 3**

Nope. But the multiplayer games are quite unique.

**LIFESPAN 7**

Again, the multiplayer options help, and there are a number of secrets to discover.

**VERDICT**

Not a great game, but not the mess it initially seems. Worth a look... but be sure to go beyond the first level or so.

**70%**

Indeed, they look like nondescript, boring, textured mazes with such real-life plant-bothering paraphernalia attempting, yet failing, to give credibility to (chuckle), the old 'garden' ruse. Those pesky artists, eh?



There's a touch of slowdown on certain occasions, and the frame rate goes down a peg or two when there's a bit too much happening, but at least it makes no real 'unforgivable' visual transgressions.

If only the same could be said for the means by which Argonaut sought to increase *Buck Bumble*'s longevity. There's an unwritten rule of videogame development that says – or, at least, *would* say if it were not, ahem, unwritten – that if you're going to send a player *right back* to the start of a level after a life is lost, you'd better make damn sure it's worth their while to do so. When you lose