

You want weird? We'll give you weird... welcome to the world of Goeman Warrior, Mystical Ninja. Basingstoke it ain't. Charlie Brooker investigates.



The Belgians could never have come up with a game like this. Nor, for that matter, could the Germans, the Norwegians, the Swedes, the Americans, the Iraqis or our good selves the British. The French might be in with a shot, but only if they were reeling around out of their heads on Angel Dust or Benilyn or both. Fact is, *Legend of the Mystical Ninja Staring Goeman Warrior* is so damned peculiar, it could *only* have been dreamt up by the undisputed masters of oblique curiosity, the ever reliable Japanese.



This is hardcore weird, even by their decidedly leftfield standards. Taking a piece of antiquated Japanese folklore revolving around a Robin Hood-style hero as its base, the game extrapolates wildly from its potentially tedious premise, to provide hour upon hour of polished exploratory action. The storyline runs roughly as follows: frustrated by the cramped conditions of their theatre's auditorium, a group of Shogun performers have decided to turn the clichéd saying "all the world's a stage" into a cold, hard reality instead of a meaningless soundbite. Using an absurdly

publisher **Konami** origin **UK**
 developer **Konami** genre **Adventure**
 release date **20/4/98** price **£49.99**

players 1 rumble no cartridge 96m battery no



1. A case for Mulder and Scully? Or is there a more rational explanation behind these UFO sightings. Rational? Goeman? Nah, not a bit of it.
2. Yae's schoolgirl looks belie her deadly ninja skills. Don't even think about pinching her bum. Hi-ya!
3. The inventory screen is essential for... erm... seeing exactly what's in your inventory, of course.

Whole in one

The Legend of the Mystical Ninja is, of course, a sequel to a fondly-remembered series of Japanese Super Nintendo games, of which only one (the first installment) ever made it to these shores. And fans of the original should pick up the thread straight away because the basic structure of the gameplay remains identical, despite the inevitable leap into three dimensions. The sole disappointment is the paucity of bonus 'mini-games', which made the original titles sometimes feel a bit like one of those illegal '387 Games in One' cartridges sold by weasel-faced petty criminals at car boot sales.



Konami may have concentrated on the overall feel of the title at the expense of some of the more impressive hidden features

(such as the horse-racing game and mini *Gradius* clones which cropped up in the original title). There's still more variety here than in 99 per cent of the other titles on the market, but somehow, compared with its 16-bit forebearers, the 64-bit incarnation is a bit of a letdown, in this respect at least. Picky as piss, that's us.



- When not bludgeoning baddies to a pulp, Goeman's chain pipe is also ideal for crossing holes and streams.



- Ebisumaru may be a little 'different', but the town folk love him just the way he is.

...the videogame equivalent of a big bag of tasty, tricky-to-shell pistachio nuts.

improbable peach-shaped UFO, they're going to transform the whole of ancient Japan into one gigantic theatre, populated by gangs of kidnapped and enslaved children, who will be forced to dance around like puppets for the amusement of others. An excellent suggestion, and one that wouldn't be entirely out of place inside the Millennium Dome, but Goeman – *Mystical Ninja's* lead character – disagrees violently. Reasoning that it somehow just isn't fair to subject thousands of innocent scallywags to a life of abject misery (clearly never having worked as a supply teacher for an inner city school), Goeman sets out to rescue the incarcerated kiddywinks and give the bad guys what for. Cue oddball action maximus.

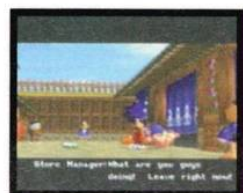
2D, 3D, deeply

Visually, the developers have clearly been heavily



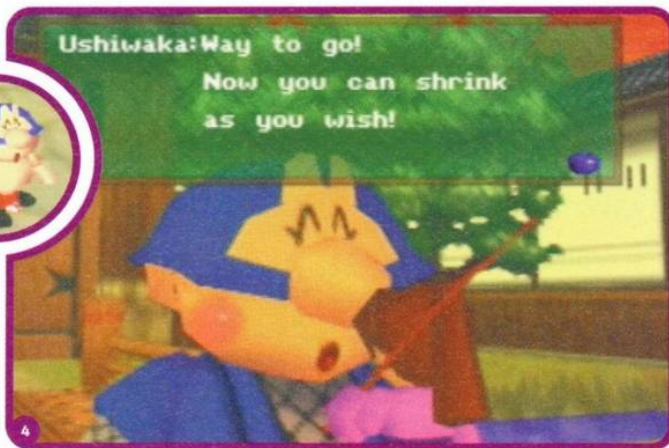
'influenced' by *Mario 64*, with a similar standard of 3D platform shenanigans providing the bulk of the action. Initially a tad bland, the game soon smacks you in the chops with a couple of stunning visual set pieces (such as a gigantic rotating head spewing fire into your eyes), just to keep you on your toes.

The structure will be familiar to anyone who's played any of the old skool Super Nintendo versions of the game: it's a light-hearted, ▶





it deserves a place on your shelf, if only to remind you that the Japanese are, to a man, insane.



1. Enter the dragon! Well, get on the back of it at least. Work your way up his spine to the boss, then give that big bad broly-headed fiend a beating he'll never forget.
2. With this spook-illuminating windup camera the ghouls don't stand a chance. But first you must find it.
3. Losing the plot? Don't worry, the ever present narrator is always at hand.
4. After a chance meeting with Ushiwaka 'the one of little height', Ebisumaru learns the way of the shrink. Good, 'cos he's sure as hell going to need it.
5. There are a few minor differences between the Western and Japanese game. Those stars, for instance – they were swastikas in the original.
6. The path ahead is blocked. Let's just hope Ebisumaru's 'two-pin' bowling skills are up to scratch.
7. In a rare moment of calm, after completing his rather nice new picket fence, Goeman takes time out to collect his thoughts. At least that what we think he's doing.
8. Slowly, does it Goeman. Just a... few... more... steps... and you're home and dry.



Legend of the Mystical Ninja



Goeman

Our hero. Mister Central Character. The Big Cheese. You get the picture. Goeman Warrior, the principal boy of *Mystical Ninja*, is the figure you'll be controlling for the majority of the game, and judging by that ludicrous barnet, he frequents the same hairdresser as erstwhile fleabag mascot Sonic the Hedgehog. In the name of self-defence, Goeman likes smacking people over the head with his pipe, a predilection that sounds ruder in theory than it is in practice. He can also wield a 'chain-pipe', which acts as an impromptu grappling hook, all the better for reaching precarious locations with.



Ebisumaru

Check out this freak. Ebisumaru is supposed to be the 'comic relief', but to be honest, we found him more than a little frightening. Perhaps it's the blue catsuit, the unconventional deployment of facial hair, or the way he likes to lie on his back and shimmy along like an earthworm. Either way, it's clear that the guy's a serious pervert who probably smells of wee. His weapon of choice is a bloody big mallet, which can be powered-up at opportune moments. Oh yeah, and he can shrink too. But for God's sake just don't let him anywhere near the kids.



Sasuke

The latest entrant into the family of charismatic pop-culture mechanoids which includes K-9, Metal Mickey, Robbie the Robot, Simon Mayo and the Backstreet Boys, Sasuke is a metallic ninja who won't 'go' unless you've got some batteries to hand. Once up and running, he likes to toss kunai throwing stars (the psychotic's version of a fifty pence piece) into the faces of all and sundry, with an air of carefree abandon which is quite frankly unacceptable in this day and age. We blame the parents.



Yae

Token female alert: Yae is a girl, with knockers and everything, although you don't get to see any of that stuff during the game, no matter how many button combinations you press, believe us. We tried for four hours solid, and there wasn't a sniff. Not even so much as a stray hair poking out the side of her pants or anything. Still, she's a mighty fine character to have on your side, being extremely adept at running, sword-wielding and playing the flute (three characteristics that, surprisingly, come in very handy).

The Fab Four



Mystical Ninja brings you not one, but four – yes, four – playable characters to aid you on your quest. Most of the time, you'll be sticking with Goeman himself, but on occasions a quick change of identity will prove beneficial – and sometimes essential. As the game begins, you can switch between Goeman and

Ebisumara. The additional characters will join your party *en route*, without even being asked, and then you can't get rid of them. A bit like Australian hitchhikers, really, except they won't suddenly try to sell you a small lump of Oxo for ten quid and then refuse to take no for an answer.



action-based caper, halfway between the arcade role-playing of *Zelda*, and the out-and-out leapathon that is the aforementioned *Mario 64*. Most of the locations fall into one of three categories: towns, countryside or castles. Towns consist of a collection of generic 'shops' providing services which range from the purchase of armour and weaponry, to saving your game, and a largely benevolent populace who mill about offering advice, clues and occasionally setting Goeman and chums off on a related sub-quest. To travel from one town to another, you'll need to venture out into the countryside, which is pretty much jam-

packed with minor predators and other associated perils. And finally the castles, each of which is a perplexing complex of classic platform gaming material, guarded by the ubiquitous 'boss' at the end. Taken on its own, each individual element is fairly unremarkable, but seamlessly combined they form a continually diverting, wonderfully varied playing experience.

Spice of life and all that

Newcomers may be confused by the initial minutes of play: not much really seems to be going on at first, and the things that *are* don't make any sense. Cross this barrier, however, and you're hooked. The constant stream of minor tasks and easy-going puzzles, coupled with the more demanding castle sections makes it almost impossible to switch



● Ready for battle, green eyes fixed on the middle distance, Sasuke prepares his devastating bouffant-hair attack!



Golden Goeman moments

There are far too many memorable moments to mention, but here are some of our personal favourites. You just never know what's going to happen next!

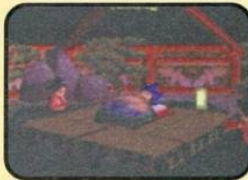
Plasma Man

Mystical Ninja's very own Mystic Meg. Just what does the future hold? Want to know? Well, best pay a visit to Plasma Man. Whenever our intrepid heroes are feeling a little lost Plasma Man is always on hand to give them some direction. Such advice doesn't come free though. It'll cost you 10 Ryos, but for that price you also get a rather spectacular floorshow from his very own troupe of belly dancers – worth the admission price alone.



One night in heaven

All this romping around the Japanese countryside certainly takes it out of you so a good night's kip is essential. There's a choice of three rooms available, but go for the super deluxe every time, where you'll be attended to by a delightful pair of geisha girls. Don't expect any extras though, it's a very respectable establishment, unfortunately.



Let's all 'DO' the Conga

Conga's an oversized head who looks like he's had one too many sunbeds for his own good. Watch it though, his bark is definitely worse than his bite, as he breathes fire! So watch your ass around this guy. Learn his pattern and then strike with your chain-pipe to send him back to that great solarium in the sky.



You're going home in a cosmic ambience

One of the most entertaining sections of the game is also the most graphically appealing: the almighty robot punch-up sequences. The first appears fairly early on, and comes complete with its own credit sequence and theme song (in Japanese, with English subtitles). Goeman is temporarily spirited inside Impact, the 'gorgeous fighting robot' who entertains dreams of being a big movie star. Rumours that he's been signed to reprise Jennifer Beals' role in *Flashdance II* could not be confirmed as we went to press.

The boxing sections resemble a kind of trippy, high-budget, sci-fi version of *Super Punch Out*, and are so much fun, you'll want to go back and play them many times over. They're also downright spectacular to look at. Invite a PlayStation-owning friend round for a quick go and watch him grind his teeth down to a fine white powder with uncontrollable jealousy.



off: there's always something *new* happening. A minor example: at one point in the game, a guard refuses to let Goeman and friends cross a bridge unless they give him a huge pile of treasure. Disgruntled, you slump off to have a look around the rest of the town. Conversing with some of the inhabitants reveals that the local fisherman knows a thing or two about outwitting the guard, so off you go in search of him. But the fisherman refuses to help you unless you leap into the river and bag a load of carp. Cue several minutes of running around, ankle-deep in water, in hot pursuit of a slippery fish. That task completed, the demanding angler hands you a barrel and suggests you hurl it at the guard's ankles. And sure enough, before long you're into *another* little sub-game, where you literally try to



Want to go somewhere fast? Easy, just summon Koryuta the dragon by playing a catchy little tune on Yae's flute, choose your destination and, hey presto, you're there!





Fee-fi-fo-fum

Now this is funny. Really, really funny. You've shrunk and you're in the big-nosed giant's (BNG) kitchen cupboard, where there are eight sweets to be had. Sounds simple enough? Not

so. It's easy pickings when the cupboard door is shut, but when BNG hears some rumblings inside, he takes a peak and if he sees you, all hell breaks loose.



Sudden Impact

When faced with the giant, Kebuce robot simply summons Impact and fights fire with fire, or rather huge robot thing with huge robot thing. Climb aboard, strap yourself in and kick some serious mechanoid butt. Just draw him in with your pincer arm and let him have it, right in the face, then bring oil to his eyes with a swift kick to his rusty nuts. Kaphumph!



Have a heart

Dharumanyo might be a fearsome opponent but go for his weak spot - his dicky heart. Years and years of boss-type shenanigans have taken a heavy toll on poor old Dharumanyo, but there's no room for sentiment so go for his ticker and tear it out. Hurrah!



● The tiny Ebisumara finds time between adventuring to shoot some pool.



● You'll split your sides at Goeman's 'Off the Wall' humour.

bowl the guard over while he leaps up and down like a great big ponce.

Each individual encounter is almost insulting in its simplicity, but the sheer quantity and variety of them, and the manner in which each accomplishment segues into the next makes it pretty much unputdownable; the videogame equivalent of a big bag of tasty, tricky-to-shell pistachio nuts.

And there are loads of other cute little touches too: from the subtitled, incomprehensible theme song, to the endearingly dreadful 'jokes' which crop up from time to time, replete with audience laugh track. Like all the best *animé*, it's



completely bewildering but oddly enchanting throughout, and Konami should be heartily congratulated for taking the effort to translate and release the game to a potentially hostile Western audience (although they *could* have taken a little more care with some of the translation, which frequently fails to make the remotest bit of sense).

As a bridge between *Mario* and the forthcoming *Zelda*, this is ideal, and while it won't last forever (and you're unlikely to go back to it once you've seen it through), it deserves a place on your shelf. If only to remind you that the Japanese are, to a man, insane. **V**



UPPERS

Noodles of personality
Hilarious hi-jinx
Totally absorbing

Clipping could've been tidier

DOWNERS

VSIXTYFOUR

A big shout to those Konami cats for translating this amazing game into English. We knew it was special when it was first released in Japan but apart from the visual gags - of which there are many - much of the humour was lost. But now, fully Anglicized-up Goeman's true greatness can be completely appreciated. An insane experience that all Nintendoids should try.

LOWDOWN

Graphics Sound Playerbilty Longevity Conclusion

