

REVIEW



PRICE 39.99

BY SEGA

RELEASE DECEMBER

OPTIONS

CONTROL: 1 JOYPAD
 GAME DIFFICULTY: HARD
 CONTINUES: PASSWORD
 SKILL LEVELS: 1
 RESPONSIVENESS: SUPERB

1ST DAY SCORE

LEVEL 4

ORIGIN

Ecco is a totally original concept in exploration games. The gameplay ever so slightly resembles an ancient game called Scuba Diver.

HOW TO CONTROL



A Releases an ultrasonic pulse.

B Launches Ecco forward with a charge attack.

C Swim speedily.

S Pause.

HOW TO PLAY

Guide Ecco through the reef levels, finding clues, solving puzzles and avoiding predators. The aim is to relocate the Pod.

ECCO

THE DOLPHIN

Go deeper. Beyond the shallow sounds where the pleasure boats drift, through the rocky inlets where only the sea-birds wheel and nest. There Ecco and his dolphin relatives live in a harmony unknown to humans. These gentle creatures, once thought to be sea-living men, speak in their mysterious way and live in the blue depths we cannot see.

Until one strange day, when the sky turned blood red and a storm descended that took Ecco's friends away. Like a giant hand it grabbed the dol-

phins and whisked them out of Ecco's sight, over rocks and islands. Alone now, he is driven to find his family, however far he may have to travel, whatever challenges he must face, because loneliness is a disease to dolphins; the only threat they face that is more dangerous than us!



▲ Nudge the shell to unravel its mystery.

HEAVY BREATHING



ECCO'S SOUND



NOOKS, CRANNIES AND SUCTION CURRENTS

Ecco is split into 27, increasingly complex, undersea levels. Much of the game challenge is provided by the rocky environment of the reef. As the depth increases the space for Ecco to manoeuvre in becomes very limited. Sometimes the ocean geography plays a part in solving the puzzles. Here are some features to expect.

CURRENTS



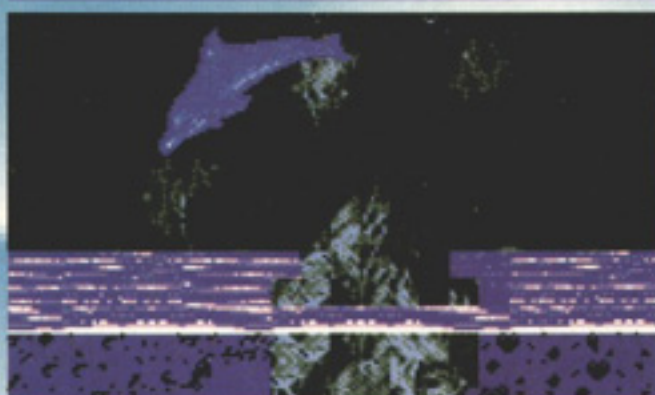
Strong currents run up from deep fissures in the sea floor. These lead to new caverns, but the currents are too strong to swim against. Manipulating objects is the only way to succeed here.

CAVERNS



Caverns are found many fathoms down in the intertwining rock complexes. A common feature here is some other trapped Dolphin that has lost its way. If you rescue these strays you may be rewarded with extra powers when it is re-united with its pod.

ISLANDS



Various lagoons in Ecco's world are separated by rocky outcrops. This forces Ecco to make dolphin leaps over these small islands.

CORALS



At the narrowest points of the reef, where Ecco must squeeze through, you usually find some sharp corals which make the passing area even narrower. Corals are a hazardous feature almost anywhere on the reef.

COMMENT

A game about a dolphin might sound a bit daft, but prepare to be dazzled: Ecco is nothing short of sensational! The graphics are out of this world - Ecco himself is superbly animated as he explores the depths and the rich photographic parallax scrolling backdrops look gorgeous. The other fish sprites are of similar quality, and the overall effect is simply stunning: Ecco is surely the best looking Megadrive game I've yet seen. Enhancing the atmosphere (if that's the right word for an underwater game) are a series of fabulous soundtracks and great effects. Fortunately the game's designers haven't spent all their time on the cosmetics - the gameplay is thoroughly enjoyable and highly addictive. The difficulty level is beautifully balanced; you're drawn into the game with a large, but fairly safe first level where you can learn the skills and tricks of dolphin aquabatics, but from then on this game is tough - and with 27 levels to conquer it's not a game that'll be completed overnight by any stretch of the imagination. It's easy to pile on the superlatives when talking about this game, but it really is that good and gets the vote as my favourite game of 1992! Move over Sonic - make way for Ecco!

▼ So fast, Ecco's a bottle-nosed bullet.



MYSTERY OF THE GLYPH

A new feature of Ecco's post-catastrophic world are the strange rotating crystals, known as Glyphs. Glyphs stand at strategic points in each level, and experimentation reveals their two vital purposes. Firstly, Glyphs being ancient and all that, contain a vast store of the ocean's knowledge and provide clues on demand. Communicate with them as you would other creatures. Secondly, some Glyphs work as a lock and key combination: Glyphs that do not allow you to pass are blown away by receiving the 'power' of another Glyph on the level. Quite why this works, and why the Glyphs are there is part of the mystery of the deep...



PISCINE PATROL



Part of the oceanic life-cycle are the shoals of brightly coloured fish that swim around the reefs. These provide Ecco with an important snack source when his energy is low. Another secret source of food energy comes through interaction with the clams. Hover over a clam and gently nudge it with a sonar beam. The result should be a health-giving pearl. However, learn the position of the clams, because some release poisoned pearls that do more harm than good.

COMMENT

Welcome a fresh and wholly original concept in console games. Ecco is by far the most impressive Megadrive game I have seen this year, and for a whole bucketful of reasons. Firstly the presentation is superb - and tailored to suit the player - a well explained manual, a good password system, and a carefully graded difficulty level that familiarises you with the control method, before engaging the brain. But your intellect is rapidly exercised with some clever and logical puzzles. The fantastic, unique control method means that play involves designing a solution to a problem, and then trying to actually execute it! The graphics are truly wonderful in all aspects - so polished, you really become entranced by the realistic undersea world. The animation is just...unprecedented. Sound is a fantastic mix of atmospheric wispy or thumping tunes, and real Whale and Dolphin song. Pardon me, in an effort to document the game I've not shown my enthusiasm enough: Ecco is **UTTERLY STUPENDOUS!**

FLEX

Ecco is an incredibly agile creature. Controlling him well is an integral part of the game in itself. Initially he may not do what you want him to, but persevere and he's soon arcing out of the water, and even turning somersaults. When underwater, Ecco defends himself by charging into his enemies nose-first. This attack is usually enough to kill or stun most creatures, or help Ecco escape from a tricky situation. Learning to control Ecco's speed is also productive. He travels quite speedily under normal conditions, but needs to speed up to leap out of the water or avoid strong currents. Travelling slowly also has a purpose: to negotiate narrow spaces, or sneak past big predators.



GUS

JELLYFISH



This simple animal drifts in large shoals, which often prove hazardous to pass. Individually they don't inflict much damage, but many might sting Ecco to death!

PUFFER FISH



A strange, spiny fish which inflates its body when threatened, thrusting out poisonous quills. These tend to congregate in dark areas of the reef and take exception to Ecco's presence. Luckily they are defenceless against a charge attack.

ECOSYS TEM

The reef is home to a multitude of species, all involved in the cut-throat struggle for survival. Ecco is lucky enough to be far up the food chain - there's not much that's big enough to eat him. But this doesn't mean that dangers do not exist present for our bottle-nosed chum. The following foes make less than welcome contributions to Ecco's well-being.

THOSE PECS



▲ Dolphins defend themselves with a bum's rush.

ECCO-ING

Dolphin sight is very sharp, but in deeper water they rely more on the mapping abilities of their echo-sound. The principle is simple: send out a sonic pulse and wait for it to return (hold down the A button). When the pulse bounces back off an object it provides an impression of Ecco's surroundings. The real-life process is a bit of a mystery to us, but in the game the result is fully-comprehensive map with all the rock formations in the vicinity displayed. Every other creature is also shown along with movable objects.



COMMENT

I'm stunned by the sheer excellence of Ecco. In fact, every single aspect that makes a game superb has made it into this game. Graphically, the game is unsurpassed. The depiction of the underwater environment is brilliant, incorporating everything, right down to the last Star Fish. The animation is super-smooth as well, and the control method literally perfect. The sound is brilliant too, with superb Orb-style ambient soundtracks. But it's the playability that counts and Ecco more than delivers. There are 27 massive levels and it took Gus and I five hours' solid play just to get through four levels - brilliant! What's more, the size of the map and the complexity of the puzzles increase with every level. Level five just had us stumped for ages! The puzzles themselves are brilliant too, be it using snails to knock down wall or slipstreaming behind rocks to avoid violent currents! Perhaps the thing that really astounds me about Ecco is that the game is ORIGINAL. It's not another platform game or a shoot 'em up or anything like that - it's new! Sonic the Hedgehog II was polished and brilliant, but it was derivative. Go for Ecco, it's just as amazing but original too and that counts a lot in my books these days.

LONG TERM REPORT

HOUR	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
DAY	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
WEEK	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
MONTH	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
YEAR	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

BREAKDOWN

STRATEGY	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ACTION	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
CHALLENGE	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
REFLEXES	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



SEA SNAIL



A harmless creature, this pointy-shelled mollusc has a particular habit of absorbing rock.

STAR FISH



Dolphins have been observed playing with star fish, and Ecco has the power to manipulate their direction with his sonar pulse. They arrange themselves in floating spirals in the deepest crevasses.

OCTOPUS



SEA-WORM



Monster of monsters, eight legged octo hangs around narrow gaps in the reef, waiting to catch any prey with its tentacles. It tracks potential prey by movement sensing.

A most sinister life-form, the worm floats lifelessly waiting for passing prey. Then it leaps and clings on with its hooked jaws. It is treacherously difficult to shake off.



SHARK



There are loads of shark varieties - but let's face it - most of them are bad news. Such is the case in Ecco, these sharks would savage our poor dolphin in a trice. However, Ecco knows that a brave attack and a confusing sonar blast should see him through.

KILLER WHALE



A peaceful relative of the dolphin clan, the killer whale is less likely to use his sharp teeth than his considerable brain, and give you the benefit of his knowledge.

PRESENTATION

▲ Services the game perfectly with a good manual, easy password system, and a pleasant demo.

90

GRAPHICS

▲ Astounding Dolphin animation, and the background graphics are a work of art.

95

SOUND

▲ Wonderful echoing Dolphin song accompanies the music score that is just right.

93

PLAYABILITY

▲ An instant hook, due to the unique control method and the game's attractiveness. The strong storyline, and gentle first levels are also positive factors.

97

LASTABILITY

▲ The intensity doesn't diminish, because every second of Ecco is fun, and thankfully the game isn't a pushover with 27 enormous levels.

96

OVERALL

97

A Megadrive classic without doubt, and a strong contender for best game ever! A unique underwater experience for those tired of unoriginal pap.