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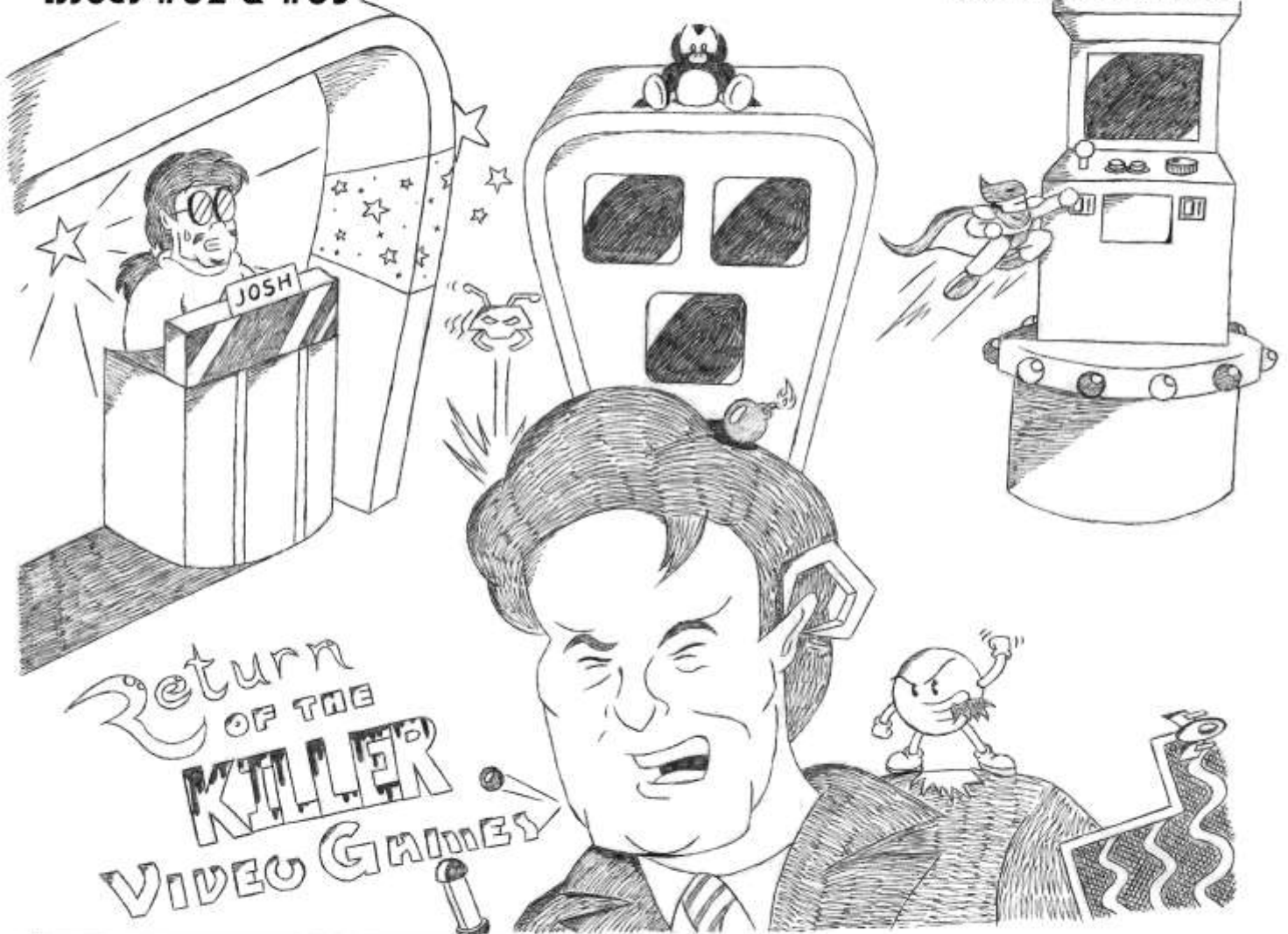
THE GAMEROOM BLITZ

JESS SHOULD JUST
BUY A NEW PEN
AND GET IT OVER
WITH...



Issues #02 & #03

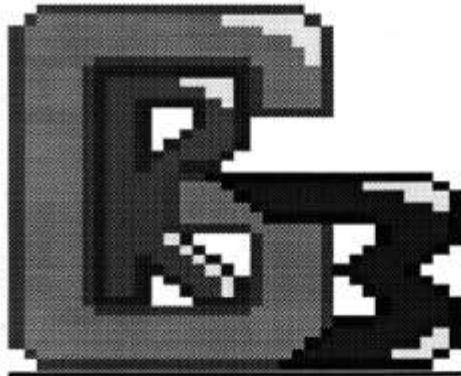
Just Two Clams!



ALSO IN THIS SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE:

Jess Dissects "Frogger" For The Game Gear
The Video Game Emulation Sensation
Josh Lesnick's Return To EG Fandom
The Top 100 Games Of All Time
...and (say it with me!) much, much, more!

Jess
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Letter From The Editor

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ON THE COVER:
 Dweeby "StarCade" host Geoff Edwards gets what's coming to him when the stars of classic video games invade the 1990's.

LEGAL-ESE:
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BEFORE I BEGIN, I'D LIKE TO THANK CHRIS BIENIEK FOR THE GREAT REVIEW OF "THE GAMEROOM BLITZ" AND FOR MENTIONING "SUPER PAC-MON REMIX" IN THE BACK PAGES OF "TIPS & TRICKS". JUST ONE CLARIFICATION, THOUGH... CONTRARY TO WHAT WAS SAID IN THE MAGAZINE, I HAVE NO INTENTION OF WRITING AN ACTUAL "TIPS & TRICKS" VIDEO GAME. I'D BE MORE THAN HAPPY TO GIVE OUT COPIES OF THE DEMO I'D WRITTEN FOR CHRIS IN EXCHANGE FOR A BLANK DISK AND THE PRICE OF SHIPPING, BUT PLEASE BE AWARE THAT ALL IT IS AND ALL IT WILL EVER BE IS JUST A DEMO.

WITH THAT OUT OF THE WAY... WELCOME TO THE SECOND ISSUE OF "THE GAMEROOM BLITZ". AS YOU MAY OR MAY NOT KNOW, I WASN'T SURE IF I WAS GOING TO BOTHER TO RELEASE IT, AS THE INITIAL RESPONSE TO THE PREMIERE WAS POOR. AT LEAST, THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT UNTIL I CHECKED MY HOTMAIL ADDRESS A FEW TIMES... EVERYONE FROM MIKE PALISANO TO JOSH LESNICK TO CHRIS B. WHEATS 'N RAISINS HIMSELF SENT LONG, DETAILED LETTERS FOR WHAT COULD QUITE POSSIBLY BE THE BEST "POST OFFICE PARANOIA" YET (WHICH IS EASY TO SAY WHEN THERE'S BEEN ONLY THREE OF THEM...). I'D LIKE TO THANK EVERYONE WHO RESPONDED TO GRB #1... WITH RISK OF SOUNDING CLICHED, YOUR SUPPORT IS WHAT MADE THIS SECOND ISSUE POSSIBLE.

ANOTHER FOUNDATION OF "THE GAMEROOM BLITZ" HAS BEEN THE MULTITUDE OF SHAREWARE EMULATORS AVAILABLE ON THE INTERNET. THESE TERRIFIC PROGRAMS ALLOW YOU TO SAMPLE GAMES AND TEST DRIVE SYSTEMS WHICH WOULD OTHERWISE BE IMPOSSIBLE TO FIND, AND THE BEST ONES DO THEIR JOBS BETTER AND OFFER MORE OPTIONS THAN THE COMMERCIAL EMULATORS AVAILABLE FOR THE PLAYSTATION AND SATURN. YOU'LL FIND REVIEWS OF THESE MOST KILLER OF APPS ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE.

THIS LEADS UP TO THE THEME OF THE ISSUE ITSELF... REDONE VERSIONS OF CLASSIC VIDEO GAMES. TO PURISTS, DESIGNING A GAME LIKE "PAC-MAN 2: THE NEW ADVENTURES" IS ON A PARALLEL WITH SPRAYPAINTING A TORPEDO BRA ON THE MONA LISA, BUT I PERSONALLY FEEL THAT THESE GAMES SERVE THE PURPOSE OF INTRODUCING ALREADY PROVEN CONCEPTS TO A NEW GENERATION OF GAMERS WHO MAY NOT BE WILLING TO ACCEPT THEM IN THEIR PUREST FORMS. BESIDES, SOME OF THESE TITLES REALLY ARE A VAST IMPROVEMENT OVER THEIR ANCESTORS, AND REPRESENT AN EVOLUTION OF THEIR BASIC PLAY MECHANICS... TAKE "SPACE INVADERS '91" OR "O*BERT 3", FOR INSTANCE. YOU PROBABLY PASSED ON MANY OF THESE GAMES WHEN THEY WERE FIRST RELEASED, AS THEY WERE LARGELY IGNORED BY THE MAINSTREAM VIDEO GAME PRESS AND EVEN MOST FANZINES... I'M HOPING THAT THE COVERAGE IN THIS ISSUE OF GRB WILL CONVINCE YOU TO GIVE THESE TRAGICALLY OVERLOOKED RELEASES A SECOND CHANCE.

THIS CHEESY OPENER IS PROBABLY BORING YOU TO TEARS SO I BEST BE GOING. OK, MAYBE IT'S JUST BORING ALAN TO TEARS, BUT I'VE NEVER BEEN PARTICULARLY FOND OF WRITING THESE EDITORIALS MYSELF... OH, SCREW IT. JUST READ THE FANZINE, WOULD YOU?

Jess Ragan. Back From The Dead

EMULATORS

They're invading your hard drive. They're devouring your spare time. They're more addictive than crack, heroin, and chocolate combined! And no one can stop them. They're shareware emulators, and more and more gamers are falling prey to their lure of playing the best video games ever released without ever having to turn on a console or step into an arcade. It is useless to resist... you will join our ranks. Read these reviews, download the software that appeals to you, and become one of us.



DAVID SPICER

And now, that wild PC program that brings yesterday's hottest arcade games into your very own home... it's Sparcade, with your host, Dave Spicer! Ooops, sorry. Just had to have an announcement like that to go along with this issue's cover... anyway. Sparcade was my first emulator experience, and it's still the best way to play such early arcade hits as "Galaxian" and "Ms. Pac-Man" at home. Like the best commercial emulators, Sparcade was coded in assembly language, making it incredibly fast. However, this also has slowed its development down to a crawl, as the author hasn't released an update to replace revision 1.95 in almost six months. This is alleviated somewhat by Sparcade's Master System and Game Gear compatibility, but its support for these systems is limited at best. Roughly one fourth of the games I've run from Sparcade refuse to work properly (Isn't designing a Game Gear emulator that's incompatible with "Gunstar Heroes" against the law in 38 states?), and many of the rest suffer from flickering screen edges and severe slowdown. Sparcade is still an impressive piece of software, but with its limited features and unreliable Game Gear and Master System support, Pentium owners who already have MAME and MASSAGE won't give it a second look.



MARZAT FAYZULLIN

When you'd read reviews of MSX software in "The Gameroom Blitz", you were probably wondering... "just what the hell is an MSX, anyway?" The answer takes us back to the early 1980s, when software mogul Bill Gates introduced what he'd hoped would become the standard for what was at the time a very unstable computer market. Powered by a Z80 processor, the MSX was superior to

many of its intended rivals, but never caught on here as the Commodore 64 was America's 8-bit PC of choice. However, it was very popular in Japan, which leads us to the purpose of fMSX: to give players on these shores a chance to experience terrific MSX exclusives like "Penguin Adventure", "Aleste", and "Bosconian" without having to pack their bags for the land of the rising sun. There's not much that needs to be said about the emulator itself... it shares the same basic engine as Virtual GameBoy and ADAMem, meaning that it's very reliable but very, very sloooooow. If you have a fast PC and the patience to track down the somewhat elusive MSX ROMs on the Internet, I strongly recommend that you tune into fMSX.

ADAMEM

MARCEL DeKOGEL, MARZAT FAYZULLIN

ADAMem is an offshoot of the previously released ColeEM and, if you're willing to go back that far, the engine used in Marzat Fayzullin's fMSX. It is noticeably faster than the other emulators Fayzullin helped create, but this doesn't save it from being the worst of the bunch. Like fMSX and Virtual GameBoy, ADAMem has a very high run rate for ColecoVision and ADAM games (only one of the two dozen ROMs I've tried- "Star Trek: Strategic Operations Simulator" won't work properly with it), but since ADAMem doesn't support native emulation of the ColecoVision's sound processors, games with background music run much more slowly than games without it. Unlike Fayzullin's other ems, there's also an option which allows you to take snapshots of your favorite ColecoVision games, but there are three very annoying catches... 1. You've got to specify that you want to take pictures of the game you're running before you run ADAMem; 2. ADAMem halts emulation for a half second and lets out a long, crude beep every time you take a picture; and 3. The snaps are stored in an odd format that isn't compatible with some paint programs. ADAMem is a more than adequate effort, but as it stands, I doubt that it's the best ColecoVision emulator available.

VIRTUAL GAMEBOY

MARCEL DeKOGEL, MARZAT FAYZULLIN

If ADAMem is the worst of Marzat and Marcel's emulators, Virtual GameBoy is by far the slowest. It's probably a little ridiculous to expect any kind of performance from my 486, but it's just as absurd that VeeGeeb runs at a fraction of MASSAGE's speed and practically stands still in comparison to Sparcade. After all, the GameBoy uses the same processor as the Game Gear and Master System, and it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that the Game Boy is far inferior to either machine... All ranting aside, Virtual GameBoy is a pretty good (if excruciatingly slow) emulation of everyone's (least) favorite portable game system. It runs pretty much anything you can throw at it, sounds almost exactly like a real GameBoy, and has many of the options of Nintendo's Super GameBoy adaptor, including the ability to select palattes and a border for the screen (you can even download nudie pictures from the Internet and use them if you so choose. I'd like to see Nintendo do that!). The interface is just as limited the ones used in Marz' other emulators, and there's no snapshot option, but anyone with a fast Pentium will agree that Virtual GameBoy is (to quote U2) even better than the real thing.

Nesticle

BLOODLUST SOFTWARE

You wouldn't expect much from this emulator if you judged it from its name and the Bloodlust Software web site... both give you the distinct feeling that it was designed by two moronic death metal fans, as if some poor soul was foolish enough to teach Beavis and Butthead how to program in C. But don't let the severed hand icon and gruesome Shitman portrait in the About... window fool you: NESTicle is the most professionally designed freeware emulator you can find on the Internet. Most of the credit for this has to go to NESTicle's intuitive Windows95-inspired

interface, which allows you to select and change dozens of options on the fly. This is a nice change of pace from most other emulators, which force you to reenter parameters from the DOS prompt before they can take effect. Another huge point in Nesty's favor is its wide range of customizable settings... and not just for the emulator itself. You can even alter the palette settings and graphics of your favorite games, then save them as your very own creations! Sort of. Still, it's as close as you're gonna get to designing your own NES games without learning assembly language. Finally, NESTicle is fast. While it doesn't burn up the road the way that Sparcade and PC-VIC do, it will run acceptably on a low-end 486 (with some games running better than others). I guess NESTicle's only real downside is that some Famicom releases won't work properly with it. Sometimes, running these troublesome Japanese titles is as simple as turning on the emulator's flip mirroring, but it takes more effort to get other games on their feet, and a few absolutely refuse to respond to user input. Otherwise, NESTicle is as good as NES emulation gets.

SPLIT'S REP

JEAN-MARC LEANG (SPLIT)

If nothing else, the Rygar Emulation Project has without a doubt the coolest intro screen ever in the history of freeware ems... you're treated to a huge hand-drawn picture of the game's title character floating aimlessly in front of an independantly moving background. I'd like to see more emulator authors do this... it shows a lot of creativity on SPLIT's part and really gets you pumped for the game you're about to play. Once you get past the impressive intro screen, you're left with a pretty good (if unexceptional) emulation of the Tecmo coin-op "Rygar", a mindless medieval clone of "Rush 'n Attack" with excellent multi-layered graphics. REP is impressively fast when you consider the fact that it's duping 16-bit hardware... it runs at just the right speed on a mid-level Pentium, and can even be coaxed into running on a low-end 486 with four megs of memory (just don't expect the game to be much fun with these limitations). There's even sound support, although it's not native and takes anywhere from three to twenty minutes to set up when you first run the program. It seems almost criminal that you can't take snapshots from REP, and CTRL and ALT work poorly as the game's jump and attack buttons, but REP is still worth checking out for those of you who enjoyed or even remember the arcade version of "Rygar". Now, how about "Ninja Gaiden"?

PC-VIC

BORIS VON SCHOOTEN

Commodore's VIC-20 was my very first personal computer, so you can only imagine how happy I was to find an emulator that supported it. Better yet, Boris Van Schooten's PC-VIC was the only emulator I could find that would run well from my older PC, a bare-bones 386SX-20 with 640K of RAM. With support for 286s and XTs with as little as 196 free kilobytes of memory, calling PC-VIC's minimum hardware requirements ridiculously low would be the understatement of the decade, but this is hardly a bad thing. Of course, this blazing speed would mean nothing if the emulator's performance weren't up to snuff, but Boris has this base covered as well... while not completely failsafe, PC-VIC does run much of the system's software reliably, with full sound support and the ability to save any game at any point (very convenient for you "Lode Runner" freaks). So, it's established that the emulator is great, but is it worth downloading just to use a computer with 5K of RAM and no sprite manipulation capabilities? You'd better believe it. The VIC-20 sounds pretty wimpy on paper, but games like "Gridrunner" and "Omega Race" prove that it can rival the 2600 and even the ColecoVision for sheer entertainment value. Forget what Arnie says... the VIC-20 is a great machine that's worthy of this equally great emulator.

MAME

Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator

MARKO BUFFONI, NICOLA SALMORIA

Yikes! This emulator, a collaborative effort spearheaded by Italian programmers Marko Buffoni and Nicola Salmoria, runs so many games it's almost scary. At last count, nearly 120 coin-ops were compatible with MAME, including old standbys like "Pac-Man" & "Galaga", extremely obscure releases such as "Diamond Run", "Krull", and "Q*Bert's Qubes", and even some relatively new titles like "1942", "Commando", and "Ghosts 'n Goblins". The large majority of these games are emulated well, but since so many people are responsible for the MAME project, the emulator's performance varies wildly from game to game. Also, it's my opinion that MAME is much too slow, and could benefit greatly from optimization and an interface similar to NESTicle's to keep everything organized. It may not be as fast or easy to use as its closest rival Sparcade, but MAME's cross-compatibility with over one hundred games makes it very hard to resist.

MESSAGE

JAMES MCKAY

Named after a humorous spelling error in the Master System shooter "Alien Syndrome", MESSAGE is a great introduction to all those games that everyone ignored when the NES and GameBoy were popular. I wasn't terribly impressed with version 0.61 of this em, but James McKay mercifully designed the newest edition to take advantage of the run-time module DOS4GW, greatly boosting its speed. There's a downside, however... Pentium users will find that MESSAGE is too fast, and will either be forced to register version 0.8 (which comes equipped with a handy slowdown feature) or stick with the less advanced MESSAGE 0.61. Sly move, James! Anyway, this em performs at about the level of NESTicle, as it's almost as fast and far more reliable. With support for roughly 98% of the games in both the Master System and Game Gear's software libraries, you have a better chance of being hit by lightning and a car simultaneously than to find a ROM that MESSAGE can't run. But you'll have fun trying... there are a lot of gems on the Game Gear (including "Ristar", "Super Space Invaders", and "Fatal Fury Special") that will leave you wondering why Sega has all but abandoned the system.



DAVID VALDEITA

There's one big problem with this emulator of Konami's innovative side-scrolling shooter "Nemesis"... the instruction file is terrible! I realize that English isn't David Valdeita's native language, but as short and confusing as NEMES32's .DOC file is, it's amazing that I was able to get the program to work at all. Aside from that... NEMES32 plays "Nemesis", and it does its job well. This Konami masterpiece was astonishingly state of the art for 1985, running from 16-bit hardware similar to the Neo-Geo's, so it's equally amazing that David was able to emulate the game almost perfectly. The only thing that's missing is the sound support, but that's understandable, as "Nemesis" used a separate processor to handle the game's background music and emulating this would probably slow NEMES32 down considerably. Of course, if you absolutely must play the game with sound, you could always download Johan Köhler's Windows95 version of the emulator... Anyway. If you wanted to love "Gradius 3" for the Super NES but couldn't stand its almost constant slowdown, this em's for you.

WOOD PULP FICTION

I took a seat before what I generously called my entertainment center... an ancient Quasar television set with countless game systems scattered haphazardly around it.

"Ahhh.... a cheesy B movie and this heeeuge bowl of popcorn! What more could I possibly ask for?"

Too lazy to actually get up, I shuffled my butt across the thinly carpeted floor to the TV and wrapped my fingers around its grimy green volume knob. With a gentle click, the great devourer of spare time came to life, presenting its master with the image of a mop-topped Asian family enjoying a picnic.

"Looks like I tuned in a little late..."

I scooted backward just enough to view the television comfortably while soaking up the cathode radiation necessary to fully enjoy a cornball monster flick. In mock anxiety, I whispered to myself, "Gee, I hope I haven't missed anything!"

Subtitles filled the lower quadrant of the screen as the father of the family began to speak. "What a wonderful day for a picnic. Nice weather; beautiful cherry blossoms... it's almost too good to be true!"

The man's wife looked to the sky. I didn't need to understand what she was saying... the confusion and worry in her face was translation enough. Nevertheless, a subtitle announced helpfully, "Honey, it looks like a swarm of insects is coming this way..."

The entire family stared upward in exaggerated angst. "Those aren't insects! They're... they're..."

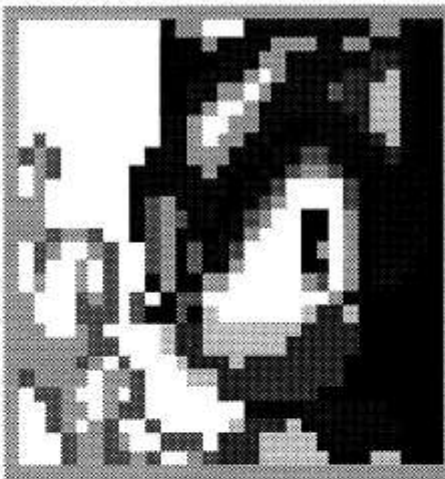
Without warning, the swarm was upon them. Small green and blue birds were everywhere, biting the hapless family under their cuticles and nesting in their bowl-shaped hair. The demonic avians chirped a harrowing song as entire park exploded into chaos. Subtitles littered the bottom of the screen as every man, woman, and child screamed in horrific agony, "AAAAH!!! SATSU-BATSU NA INKO! SATSU-BATSU NA INKO!!!!!"

Just then, a commercial break interrupted the ensuing frenzy. "We'll return to 'Godzilla Versus The Killer Parakeets', in just a moment."

RIP, Tomoyuki Tanaka



MISH-MASH COMICS. A CUTE L'IL DIVISION OF *Geo*CREATIONS*,Co.



ART IMITATES LIFE?

If you've been in fandom for a while, you may remember "MASTERminds", Todd Lintner's subversive publication devoted to the Sega Master System and Genesis. In issue 11, Todd paid tribute to Sega's decision to rate its releases on the basis of content with a crude cover illustration of Sonic the Hedgehog flipping the bird, grumbling, "Fuck you all! My next game's gonna be MA-17!"

Most fan-eds of the time saw the humor in this, but wondered aloud if Sega itself would feel the same way about the irreverent use of its popular mascot.

Apparently, Sega of Japan didn't mind... above is an actual picture from the Japanese Game Gear release "Sonic Drift 2", with Sonic expressing himself much as he had in "MASTERminds" four years ago. Is this all just an incredible coincidence... or is it something more? Special thanks to Alan Lanoie for "Sonic Drift 2" and James McKay for version 0.72 of MESSAGE (see "The Emulators" for a review of this exceptional Master System/Game Gear emulator).

NG#75

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Post Office Paranoia!

Bieniek Explains It All...

(From a response to an Email message)

What's the deal with "VideoGames"? Is "Tips & Tricks" the only VG magazine LFP does these days?

Hey, Jess! Long time no see!

Yeah, "VideoGames" is dead... no great loss. I hadn't been involved in the direction of that magazine since mid-'95- and even then I was still under the thumb of an idiot who knew nothing about video games or magazines. VG was sold to Ziff-Davis- the same company that bought EGM- and subsequently dismantled. I was actually kind of relieved. Yes, T&T is LFP's only game mafazine and probably will be for a long time. Have you seen it lately? I'll send some copies with this letter.

Will T&T continue to be published?

Yeah, it's doing really well! We're having trouble getting ads, but our newsstand sales and subscriptions keep growing.

If so, will T&T continue to review fanzines?

Si, senior! I've only been getting about one fanzine a month, though, so I can honestly say that I've reviewed every single 'zine that we've received since we decided to add 'zine coverage a couple of months ago. Did all of the great 'zine editors die, or have they just gone to college?

I've tried sending T&T a fanzine but it was returned. Has the publication changed addresses without my knowing it?

Well, we did move into a new office in mid-'95, but I'm not sure where you sent it. Oh my ***, a new Jess Ragan 'zine??? I can't wait to see it! Send it in!

If I sent a disk containing some demos and games I've written, is there even a remote possibility that said demos and games would

be mentioned in T&T?

Sure, I'd be happy to! See, there's a whole chunk of the magazine that consists of nothing but tips, plain text on white backgrounds. We wanted to make it look more interesting, so we added these sidebars... actually, they're on the bottom of each page... which we fill up with anything that we feel like putting in there. 'Zine reviews, CD reviews, pictures of Japanese toys, old arcade games, pictures of Betty... just weird shit, very stream-of-consciousness crap that sometimes is more interesting than the rest of the magazine. I saw the "Super Pac-Mon" review in "Digital Press"... looks cool!

Saw your boss on "Politically Incorrect". How can you stand working for such a troll, anyways?

You mean LFP himself? Well, all I can say is that I don't know him personally. I can say, however, that the company executives that I do deal with have always treated me very fairly, and I'm very happy with the way things have been going since a certain monkey-faced "editor" left the company.

Well, uh, I guess that's it. If you'd be so kind, write me or call... my Hotmail Email access is as one would expect from a Java-Scripted piece of software kind of screwy. Thanks.

Hmm... I don't know anything about "Hotmail" or "Java Scripts"... does this mean that you can send me E-mail but I can't send you E-mail back? Oh well... I'll just print this message and send it off in a regular old envelope.

Good to hear from you again... keep in touch!

Chris B.

I'll do that. Thanks for the letter, and before I move on to the next one, let me stress that "Tips & Tricks" needs more fanzines for its "Zine Patrol" column. If you're tired of Arnie Katz' token reviews in "Fandom Scope", and would like national exposure in a real video game magazine, send your 'zines to Chris ASAP. The address is on the back of this issue.

Ken-spiricy Theories

Dear Jess,

Thank you for your letter but as far as I know, it is just a coincidence.

Ken Usui

Before my readers start to think that I've lost even more of my marbles, let me explain... I was searching for information about one of my childhood idols, the legendary blackjack player and video game book author Ken Uston, on the Internet late last year. I was pretty depressed when I'd confirmed the rumor that Mr. Uston had lost a battle with cancer in 1988 (I wish you hadn't been right about this one, Russ...), but this did give me a wacky idea: why not try to contact his surviving relatives? Apparently, Mr. Usui isn't one of them (despite sharing his last name with Senzo Usui, Ken Uston's father), but I appreciate the time he took to respond to my letter. Thanks for playing along, Ken!

Greetings From Lanoie

Yes, yes, I know it's been quite a while since I last wrote, but I finally got off my buns when you sent that little poll, and hey, things happen. I don't do stuff as often as I would like to anymore.

Most of my opinions on "The Gamera Blitz" #1 are scribbled on your survey; I hope you can read them. Gotta love any fanzine where the author can sketch himself as Quark! Er, I should say, a Ferengi. The "Star Trek" theme was a pretty good idea. Unfortunately, it doesn't really help your issue much, because frankly, every "Star Trek" game I have ever played sucks. "Star Trek" is all about the fact that aliens didn't invade the Earth, humans didn't erupt into nuclear war, etc., but all the "Star Trek" video games seem to be about is action, and let's face it, killing. Though most actual episodes in all the "Star Trek" series' (should that be serieses? Series?) have this sort of stuff in them as well, under no circumstances do we see the Enterprise blazing through space, taking out everything it encounters. And the games that have tried to do more than action are usually just plain boring. I guess what I'm trying to say is that what I love most about "Star Trek" is the character interaction, not the phaser blasting, and no game really reproduces this very well. That said, it was nice reading about all the odd versions of "Star Trek" that were released for all the older game systems. Your reviews of the series were cool as well, highlight being Safe Predictions of course.

Somehow, I knew you would kinda bitch at Microsoft since you got your new PC. Really, I think when I complain about Win95, I'm mostly just joking around, or going with the

crowd. Win95 really is a nice piece of work (I hear OSR2 is really quite fast). There are some things about it that really irk me, though. Win95 seems to have a conflict of interest: by calling directories "folders" and using shitty, "easy-to-use" but worthless programs like Explorer (I always use File Manager, except to change .PIF files...), it apparently tries to cater to newbies, making the simplest task anal. Saving a file, for instance. Opening a little save box takes as long as it does to open most entire programs! That's mostly due to the excessive, crappy graphics, but the save-file interface isn't very good either, compared to how quick and easy it was to save things in Win3.1 programs. Who really cares if you have to learn what a drive is? I really don't like people that expect to grasp all computer concepts without giving them a bit of thought. D'oh! And I was praising Win95, hee hee... Anyway, basically, Win95 is a great operating system. I installed Linux a few days ago, and the interface is very arcane, even in X-Windows. Although learning Linux may make some people feel cool (and it does have a few added benefits), mostly, it just makes every little task hard. So while in a way Win95's catering to newbies really annoys me, Linux's making everything hard just for the sake of it isn't that great, either.

Before I let you go (I'm working on "Infestation" #17 right now... you should be receiving #16 in no more than a week [damn copy place!]), I just want to say a bit about fighting games. Now, I've played most of the "big" 3D fighting games, like "Tekken", "Toshinden" (what does that mean in English, anyway?), etc., but the "3D" parts did not do diddley squat for the game. Neo-Geo fighting games like "Fatal Fury 2" let you jump around in the background, too. How is a game suddenly changed because its graphics are now in "3D"? It's ridiculous. I played "Street Fighter EX" today. It was a pretty awesome game, but the "3D" aspect of the graphics made the game look much, much worse. I saw nothing in that game that could not be done easily with sprites. Perhaps the showing off of the last few hits needs "3D" graphics to work, but I'm sure we could get along without that, since it does nothing for the gameplay. I am truly puzzled. What is so good about "3D" fighting games? Baffled, I am... from nice looking, smooth sprites, to blocky polygons, just for the sake of it. For the love of [insert your favorite deity here... -ed.], **WHY?????**

Oh well. I'll try to keep in touch more; do the same, later...

/Alan/
/Lanoie/

You know... you're absolutely right. "Star Trek"'s emphasis on plot and character interaction has made for some great moments on television, but it hasn't done jack for video games. The material itself isn't entirely

to blame, however... some of the fault should lie squarely on the shoulders of the programmers who foolishly attempt these games, as they never try hard enough to make them work as entertainment or "Star Trek" memorabilia. As bad as "Crossroads of Time" was, I would have given the game at least another ratings point if the designers had taken the time to add digitized pictures of the cast. Unfortunately, the geniuses at Playmates thought DS9 fans wouldn't care if their favorite characters from the show were given Tic-Tacs for heads, making "Crossroads" that much worse.

I don't have much to say about Windows95 (in fact, I'm kind of wishing I had a copy of it... as much as I hate to admit it, I've really gotten attached to the new interface). 3D fighting games, on the other hand... now that's a different story. I've always believed that fluid character movement and stiff, unintuitive control make strange bedfellows, yet that unlikely combination has been the defining characteristic of every 3D fighting game I've ever played. Someday, that will change, but until then, I'll stick with playing "Street Fighter Alpha 2", "Night Warriors", and whatever Neo-Geo game the dweebs from "Next Generation" are mindlessly bashing this month.

The Polka Dot Girl, The Gold Watch, And Everything

Jess:

I must apologize profusely for the delay. I distinctly remember promising you a letter on the phone a few weeks back. I feel, in the words of a famous unnamed shrimp, like a jackal caught with a pile of stolen coinage in its' pockets. Or whatever. Something similar to that anyway. Thanks very much for reminding me of my obligations to you. I know how hard it is to do a quality 'zine, and even though I trade with you, I also know how frustrating it is when you get tepid responses after putting all that work into your issue. I did lay out the page with your letter a week or so ago, so it's only fair to respond to your issue in kind with something interesting for you to print in "The Gameroom Blitz" #2. Enough lame excuses from me... I have pulled the premiere edition of your fanzine out from my teetering pile of 'zines, and have now re-read, refreshed and rejuvenated my mind and have these effusive yet critical comments for you to peruse.

Even though I couldn't care less about classic games now, I still had fun reading your funky "Star Trek" reviews. Michael Blanchet obviously missed the cool deconstructivist notion of "Star Trek: Strategic Operations Simulator"... it was supposed to be like playing

the game on a computer, not a true simulation (despite the title). It's kind of like those "Tron" games. Sure, I admit those windows are kind of confusing to the novice, but you have to admire Sega's foresight by including what is now referred to as "multitasking windows" in a video game almost ten years before said catch-phrase became widespread. I have to agree with you that the ColecoVision version was fantastic. The graphics and sound were simply amazing, yet it was one of those games you never hear about- even in the classic gaming community (which should know better...). Some other games that aren't talked enough about include "Frenzy" on the ColecoVision, "Happy Trails" on the Intellivision, and my all-time favorite "dark horse" classic, "Space Dungeon" on the 5200 [you hear about the PC version on the internet? Could be worth a look... -ed.]. I haven't really gotten into the Vectrex version of "Star Trek", but that's probably due to the fact that it's just a really weird, hard-to-get-into game. Kind of like "E.T." and "Raiders of the Lost Ark" on the VCS. Damn, I'm writing about classic games now, even though I promised not to in the last "Laser" (yes, it was the last one...). It's not the worst habit I'm holding onto (I mean, compared to smoking?), so whatever.

I dunno, Jessie [you do realize that you're cruisin' for a brusin', don't you? -ed.]... it seems to me like sometimes, I feel like I've said all I have to say, and the efforts to preserve these old games could be better spent exploring new territory. Do you agree with me on that? I'm still really confused, but I guess that's what I enjoy most: Adventure and discovery. I had this sense when I'd first started collecting, rediscovering all those lost games, dragging gems out of the rubble of the game crash, you know what I mean. But now I feel like the tomb has been thoroughly exhausted and there are no new discoveries to make. Well, whatever. I guess I'm still apt to go off on these tangents for no apparent reason. Moving on to your letters column: thanks for printing that letter from Jeff Minter. He's a really good guy and has lots of talent, and I feel like an idiot for making those comments about him in my last letter. He seems so down to Earth, unlike so many of the arrogant and transparent, insecure people I've run across in the industry. Looking back on MY letter, I think it sucked... it was very juvenile and stupid for me to have written it. Hopefully, THIS letter will be adequate restitution for it. Hopefully.

I really liked your cleverly named Zina section, man. I'm not going to get into criticizing your reviews- after all, this is your opinion about someone else's opinion- but I think that the best 'zines are the ones that take chances and break new ground consistently. Too many fanzines use the same pat formulas issue after issue [You mean like "Fantazine"? Oops, wrong Pat formula... -ed.] and get stuck in a rut. I admit that's where I've been for the past year or so, but the renovations I'm

making... OK, so sue me. Everything is about me! ME! ME! ME!!! MY fanzine, MY attitude. Blah, blah, blah. I'll shut the fuck up about "me" now.

Moving onto the "Re-View Mirror" section... I'll stick to commenting on the games that you and I have both played. Yeah, I really love "Blaster Master" on the NES, as well. I have a question: have you played BM2 yet? You'll love it. It's got more of the same timeless gameplay and action.

Yeah, "Galaxian" on the ColecoVision was a sterling translation of the game. Ever wonder why Atari did Coleco a favor by releasing it when A. Coleco made some truly horrible games for the 2600 and B. Coleco never supported the 5200 with even one release? My guess is that the company was sold to Tramiel right around the time Atarisoft starting cannibalizing Atari's own systems. The stories of corporate chaos and suicidal decision making make more sense in retrospect than they did at the time...

Oh, well. You can't look at the past strictly as a lovey-dovey time when everything was perfect (although the 80's were mighty close! -smug ed.). I mean, back in 1983, I went to sleep every night worried about nuclear bombs thanks to that lousy "Missile Command" game. Who made it? Atari. I know it sounds really stupid... I mean, how can an abstract action-packed war game like "Missile Command" give a kid nightmares? Well, I WAS only a kid. Still, I shudder whenever I see a trackball.

I guess we'll have to DISAGREE about Psygnosis' masterpiece "WipEout". That game turned me on to techno! Without it, I wouldn't be the mindless "Orbital" worshipper that I am today. 1996 was a good year thanks to that game. When the first "WipEout" came out, it changed my world. I remember sitting there in Sam Goody with an "Everything Zen" CD single and the second "Orbital" CD (with Halcyon and Impact) and deciding that this "Orbital" group would be better because I heard on the "Net" that it was kinda like the cool music in "WipEout". The rest, as they say, is history. I'll always love "WipEout", because it saved me from listening to Bush. So there. Of course, the soundtrack in the first game is still pretty decent...

Haven't really played much of the other stuff in your mirror. Too bad (as if this letter hasn't dragged on long enough, right?).

I don't know about your article on operating systems... it was the only thing I didn't enjoy reading. The only thing I have to say is what my Dad told me: "It's not your tools, it's how you use them." Really, I don't care- NT or 95? Dear Jess, please stop worrying about these issues... they do not matter. I have had to put up with people for years who argue about their computers to the point where it ceased any useful purpose. I have always believed that those who are obsessed with

their hardware should get lives. Who cares what BRAND your computer is? It's how you USE it that matters. To drive the point home completely, so even an EGM editor can understand it: No one remembers what kinds of brushes Michelangelo used, but very few have forgotten about his ceiling frescoes on the Sistene Chapel, now have they [actually, all people seem to remember about Michelangelo is that he was gay... -ed.]?

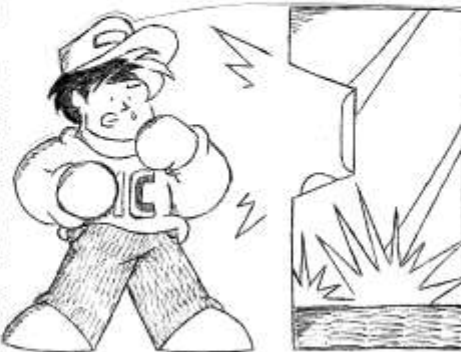
Well, I guess I'll wrap things up now. Sorry for keeping you hanging about this letter for all these weeks, especially after promising to send you one for "The Gameroom Blitz". I really enjoyed the issue a ton. Kindly send more.

Michael Palisano

Mike, you're being way too hard on yourself. I thought your last letter was hilarious, and I'm sure I'm not the only one that feels that way. I only wish I had the room to write a worthy response to this one...

With all due respect, I feel that your rallying cry for gamers to ignore the past is misguided. If anything, commercial emulators and loose translations of games from the early 80's have breathed new life into a market filled to overflowing with dozens of firesome "Doom" and "Tekken" clones. Game companies have released very few truly original games in the last five years, and turning one's back on the classics won't make these companies any more receptive to new concepts.

Are you kidding!? It's not the least bit "stupid" that you found "Missile Command" so frightening as a child. In fact, it's kind of a relief, because I felt the same way about "Robotron:2084" when it was first released. It still has without a shadow of a doubt the most terrifying plot ever in a video game, and those Brain Robotrons- hideous mechanical creatures with the ability to turn humans into mindless, radioactive zombies- still give me the creeps. If that game doesn't send a chill up your spine, how about Josh Lesnick's personal bane, "Sinistar"? Nothing makes you feel quite so helpless as hearing that game's satanic star cruiser bellow "BEWARE, I LIVE!" before you've collected enough Sinibombs to destroy it. Less rational is my brother's "BurgerTime" phobia. I guess the concept of animated food that tries to eat you wasn't terribly appealing to him...



Lesnick Abducted By Aliens!

Waiii! Your Email DOES work!

Okayyyy... Spring Break is over... still need to send you Yumi #2... ^ ^; I think what I'll do is just sent it to you without a letter and give you your "Gameroom Blitz" response on an Email.

"Why not now?" Just because. Wahahahaha! Actually...

I rather liked it... it's a step above "Project: Ignition" 'cause it has the great writing now presented in a nice, slick, laser printout quality! The copy quality wasn't really that bad, actually... better than "Ryuken" #6's. I like the mixture of classic and current game reviews, too... there just aren't enough fanzines that do that kind of thing...

"Star Trek: Strategic Operations Simulator"?! Ack! That reminds me! "Deep Space Nine" is on now! Excuse me...

(Josh watches "Deep Space Nine".)

Okay... where was I? Ah, yes, the "Star Trek" game. I actually remember that from the arcades. I don't think anyone played it because the poor thing was released at around the same time as Atari's infinitely superior "Star Wars". I never actually played it myself, though.

Yes, I'm watching "Deep Space Nine" now. My new roommate is a fan of the show and he kinda wound up making me one. I'm not a HUGE fan... it still doesn't hold a candle to anime' [actually, it sets it ablaze with a blowtorch... -ed.], but DS9 is still enough of an improvement over the other "Star Trek's" to make it quite interesting... I never even got into "Next Generation", really. Its recent movie was interesting, but I actually liked "Independence Day" better...

Yikes... Jeff Minter is one of your readers... hope I don't get any letters from him if my comments on "Tempest 2000" get printed! ^ ^; That really was a lousy game, though.

I haven't been playing video games much at all lately... Got "Keio Yugekita!" for the Saturn (not sure if I told you already), and it's really ceyute... not much to do now that I've beaten the game ten times, except to show it to my friends. I'd like to get a few of the RPGs for the Saturn, though I'll risk wasting even MORE time because of it... ^ ^; Also, I finally finished "Bust-A-Move" in under two bucks. I am king. I've noticed that the N64... well, it REALLY sucks, doesn't it?

I guess if there's one problem I had with the 'zine, it's in the ending article where you complain about EGM's treatment of the

Genesis. I mean, really, I believe I've read this same paragraph before in 250 of your other articles. Get over it, already! = ^ ^ =

I hope there will be a second issue too, 'cause revamped classic games are something I'm pretty fond of. I wonder why the TurboDuo "Galaga" game is called "Galaga '90" when it's based directly upon the arcade game "Galaga '88"? There's a place in Austin that has both that game and "Tempest", and I was ecstatic... but both games are impossible. ^ ^;

Have you received the latest "Overkill"? There's a rather glowing review of GRB there... people seem to be taking their time responding to "Yumi-Chan" as well, but then, considering that I took my time GETTING it to them... ^ ^;

Fruitbat,
Joshua

I guess your opinion of the rant in "Game Over" would depend largely on how much of my work you've already read. Luckily, many of the fan-eds around today had never gotten their hands on a copy of "Project:Ignition" or any of the older fanzines I'd contributed to, so the complaints seemed new to them even though everyone else has read them dozens of times. In any case, I've said all I feel I need to about "Electronic Gaming Monthly's" blatantly obvious bias, and shouldn't need to bring it up again... at least until the next Annual Buyer's Guide comes out. ^_^

While we're on the subject of complaints... were you insinuating that I'd edit part of your "Now Playing" column just because Jeff Minter reads my fanzine? I'm insulted! Actually, I was going to print all your comments about "Tempest 2000" in bold, then give Jeff your address so he could bludgeon you with a Jaguar and force you to play "Defender 2000" for three straight days! Actually, we're both in luck... Jeff has never read a single issue of "The Gameroom Blitz", and since I don't have his street address, he probably never will.

What else...? Glad to hear that you're getting back into video games. Everyone, if you'd like to see what Josh has been up to lately, or if you're new to this fandom and never had the chance to read "Video Apocalypse", do yourselves a favor and check out "Josh 'n Zoe's Now Playing", located elsewhere in this issue. I guarantee you won't regret it!

On The Next Donoho...

Jess:

Okay. Time to settle something that plagues you, Pat, Sean, and Katz. It's "Above AND Beyond", not "Above PLUS Beyond" (use the friggin' ampersand, not the plus sign!). It's kinda like saying "Project - Ignition" (er,

somehin'). I'll be anxiously awaiting the full-page apology you'll be printing in the next GB [sure, when I get that entire issue of A&B devoted to apologizing for forgetting the 'R' in GRB... -ed.].

Where do I begin? Superb job on the issue. I tell you, with the issues of "Concept" and now GRB I've got laying around, I may never need to buy toilet paper again. Guess you save a bundle on postage costs with the micro-thin paper, though...

The Star Trextravaganza (ugh) was different, and made quite an engrossing read, considering I haven't played even one of the version of ST:SOS you reviewed. I enjoyed the revs of all the "Star Trek" series, although I suppose I can only relate to the original series and "The Next Generation". I do catch the now-syndicated "Next Generation" repeats on FOX every now and then, and try to flip on the original "Star Trek" whenever I have nothing to do at 4:00 A.M. Monday mornings (not as rare as you'd probably think).

Lessee... otherwise, I remember really liking this issue's "Re-View Mirror" way more than in the issues of "Concept" [nani? "The Re-View Mirror" was only in one issue of "Concept"... -ed.]. Maybe it was 'cos of the rather obscure titles you chose to review. I tell you, you'll have a VERY difficult time finding "E.T. Phone Home" reviewed in any pro mag.

Directly following your game reviews was "El Libro", another one-of-a-kind piece. I dunno why you chose a handful of books to mention in the editorial; it seems to me that, in addition to the rather dated titles mentioned, newer books like Sheff's "Game Over", Herman's "Phoenix", and a few others should've made it in to paint a more complete picture.

Generally, I'd have to agree with your sentiment on Micro\$oft's products. Windows 95 is fine, I guess, but the bullshit bonanza about games running better and its "innovative design interface" are just not true.

"Microsoft Internet Explorer"s a browser that more than suits everyone's needs, but the crappy design interface and lack of personalized features has always bugged me.

"Word 95" was REALLY bad, but the new Office 97 suite of applications (including "Word 97") seems to have changed entirely... the tight integration between the apps and the easy web-functionality (forgive me if this is starting to sound like a Microsoft press release) really make it worth the money. Now I'd like to know how Microsoft gets off charging \$500 for it...

The hell with "Exchange"... I've always been perfectly content with the nice, diminutive "Microsoft Internet Mail". Ten seconds after you've loaded the app, you're reading mail! (Try saying that with "Exchange"...)

M\$ "Bob" was just a product released during a few months of Microsoft downtime with hopes that it would stir a profit among

"beginning" (ie too clueless to know better) PC users.

Anyway, I guess it's just Microsoft's way of doing business (or, as often heard around these parts, "bidness") that bugs me. They act like their products are the holy grail of computing, but what you usually end up with are a bunch of dull, utilitarian applications. 70% of the time you can find better software with the same functionality from a competitor, and for a much lower price.

To end this obnoxiously long letter, now... thanks for the wonderful issue. As I'm sure you've already discovered, "Game On! USA", the magazine that you liked so much, is now dead. I've really dissed EGM enough these past few months, but I guess I'll use your negative comments in "Game Over" to do it a little more... reports that EGM has "changed" these past couple of months are grossly oversimplified. If it's changed at all, it's changed for the worst. Uh, what else? Thanks for the kind words in reviewing A&B: I'm sure you'll be glad to see that with issue #7 (really, it's almost done!) that the IBTLishness with be eliminated (how many times have you heard that?). Stay cool...

-Tom D.

P.S. Don't think that I didn't catch that quip in your letter to Rick Florey... maybe I just WILL add another staple or two to A&B.

P.P.S. I wonder how many times the title "Game Over" was used as a fanzine's closing editorial?

P.P.P.S. I'm still kinda wondering why the name change to "The Gameroom Blitz" took place at all. Wouldn't it have just been easier to keep the old "Concept" title?

Tom, Tom, Tom, Tom, Tom... my comment in "Overkill" wasn't meant as an insult! I was just making the point that some fan-eds prefer to take an honest, unpretentious route in publishing their fanzines, as you do with yours. That's nothing to be ashamed of... in fact, I appreciate that "Above and Beyond The Lines" is a reflection of your personality, not someone else's.

All sarcasm aside... your question about the title of my own fanzine is a good one, so I'll try to answer it as best I can in what little space I have. Those of you who've known me for a while will probably remember that I was the editor of two fanzines, "Project:Ignition" and "Concept". "Concept" was a spin-off of P.I. with a focus on electronic game design and was never intended to be my flagship fanzine. Nevertheless, when I'd gotten my Vectrex about a year after the last issue of "Project:Ignition" was published, I felt compelled to offer my opinion of it, and after much thought, decided to release a Vectrex guide under the "Concept" banner.

Getting to the point, I never really changed the name of my fanzine to "The Gameroom Blitz". In fact, I'd go as far as to

call the last issue of "Concept" "The Gameroom Blitz" #0, since it has very little in common with (and, might I add, is far superior to) previous editions of "Concept". It almost makes me wish I'd gone with the original title for the guide...



Oversized Systems Monthly



Die Now, Game Fan

Jessica [aHEM... -ed.],

The short memo on the back of your 'zine was scary enough to make me reply... I figured that if I didn't, you'd send some guy named Bubba over to break my legs or something [absolutely untrue! His name is Vinnie, actually... -ed.]. Actually, since the next issue of "Video Zone" (23) is still far off in the distance... you get one of the only big letters I've ever actually written. For some reason, I just don't write huge correspondence, if I ever send stuff that isn't a 'zine at all... Uh... my first reaction is to just grab your issue and start replying to everything I figure I should, so here we go...

Nice cover! Although the guy in the middle looks a little like your rendition of Al [Ricciatelli? It is. -ed.]. Maybe it's just your drawing style [great, now you're beginning to sound like Russ! -ed.]. I have to admit, the whole idea of a "Star Trek"-themed issue turned me off at first. Uh... actually, it still does. So I really shouldn't comment on the "Star Trek" sections, but... ah, what the hell. Stamps are cheap, so I will. That said, I did enjoy the review(s) of all the versions of "Star Trek: Strategic Operations Simulator". Quite a good idea, but... you should have grabbed some pictures of the games and stuck them in. It would have helped distinguish the differences between them.

The letters section... well, there's just not much to SAY about a letters section! That's why I don't include them... space is precious. If I ever had the room (or the letters), though, I would. It's just personal preference, I guess. Now the web page, I can put letters on. I just don't get any...

Liked the title of the 'zine review section. Cute. And hey, is that "Video Zone" in the picture? Well, it might be [the world may never know...-ed.]. The review of "Digital Press" #319 cracked me up.

While on the general subject of other 'zines, I take it you've still been getting "Game Mag"? Because neither Al nor I have been

getting it for a very long time. Plus, I've been sending Jon "Video Zone" for that same amount of time with no reply. I think it's time for another open letter in VZ, 'cause something like this is unacceptable. Has he been reviewing "Video Zone" in "Game Mag"?

You have the review section I wish I could have... tons of games... ^_^ Actually, what really intrigued me was the "Shatterhand" review, and not because of the Leonard "Pee Wee" Herman reference... you asked if anybody remembered "Shadow of the Ninja" (and then said, "of course not"). Actually I do remember it! It was sort of a sleeper hit, because it came out of nowhere and was pretty damn good, but few people bought it. I really enjoyed it, though... in fact, I think I still have it! As I recall, it was very much like a two-player "Ninja Gaiden". Fast action, nice graphics, cool weapons. It had a pretty innovative weapon upgrade system for the time, too.

Nothing much to comment on otherwise, except for "El Libro", which was good (I have two copies of Kubey's book. Got them at a dollar store... there were like ten of them) except for the fact that you left a lot out. Well, I'm not the kind of person to bitch and then not DO anything about it, so attached you'll find a follow-up review/article. I'll include some of the newer stuff (not "Super Nintendo Secrets", but certainly other Rovin books) because those are pretty much gone now too.

I believe I've already addressed this during our phone call, but in the game of "Nights" (I know, Sega and "Game Fan" capitalize it "NiGHTS", but they're basically idiots) you spend the game wandering around in 3D mode trying desperately to get back into the 2D sequence.

Um, speaking of "Game Fan"..... aaaaagh! It's hard to write seriously about something that makes you want to tear your lips off. The staff of "Game Fan" (with one exception... hopes he gets out of there soon) are just a bunch of complete idiots. They just shouldn't be writing a magazine. I swear to [uh, you know... -ed.]. The thing that hit me the hardest was when Nick "Fuckhead" Des Barres tried to be funny by referring to the game "Wrinkle River Story" as "Linkle Liver Story" because, as he put it, "that's the way it's spelled in Japanese." What a jerk! I mean, is he trying to be funny by making fun of Japanese? I mean, it's NOT Romanized that way at all! He's just trying to appear all-knowing [and failing miserably... -ed.]. What an asshole. And even when he did the capsule review of the game, he writes, "Linkle is a good game...", etc. That's it; I'm getting off this topic before I implode.

Well, not much time left, so I'd better sign off. Hope to see the next GRB soon; like, maybe you could cut your deadline in half and release it in a HALF year...

-Chris K., illegitimate son of Steve "Quartermann" Harris and Julia Child

I think everyone agrees that Nick Rox has far exceeded his stupidity quotient, even for someone who writes for "Game Fan". Anyone remember those irate "Beverly Hills: 90210" fans who edited a 'zine called "The I Hate Brenda Newsletter", devoted to bashing ex-cast member Shannen Doherty? I wonder how long it'll be before someone from this fandom does the same thing to Nick Des Barres...

Funny you should mention "Game Mag". Just when I thought my subscription to EGM⁹ ran out, along comes issue 27. I'm assuming you received it too, but if you haven't, consider talking to Jon Ratcliffe directly before dragging the whole sordid affair out in the open. I wasn't particularly fond of your open letter to Tom Donoho, so you can only imagine how Tom himself felt about it...

If you thought "Shadow of the Ninja" was any good, you'll be blown away by "Shatterhand". It's not terribly original (none of Natsume's NES games were), but since its graphics, soundtrack, and gameplay are all top-notch, I doubt anyone who bought it noticed, or cared. Coincidentally, I completely forgot that Leonard Herman was also the name of the guy that wrote "Phoenix: The Rise and Fall of Video Games". Is this just a weird coincidence, or does he have a pair of bionically enhanced arms too?

Care to shoot the breeze? Next issue's topic is "Cuteness in Video Games", so if you'd care to talk about this, or heck, even if you don't, send letters of comment to...

POST OFFICE PARANOIA!

And no, I don't offer any cheesy prizes for the best written or most psychotic letters. In a day and age where gamers are either coddled, patronized, or blown off by the mainstream video game press, isn't a truly good letters column like this one rewarding enough?

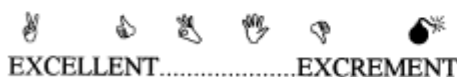




'ZINA

Warrior Newsletters

THE RATINGS SYSTEM:



VIDEO MAGIC #132

Frank Polosky

At first glance, it's a newsletter, with articles and reviews from such fandom mainstays as Mike Palisano and "Digital Press" Tony Bueno. However, just flip a few pages, and PRESTO! It's now a catalog, with price lists and pictures of dozens of games and related items. This journalistic slight of hand can only be the work of Frank Polosky, who's been performing his "Video Magic" for crowds of classic game collectors for what seems like centuries. I received my first copy of VM five years ago, and find it shocking that NOTHING has changed about the fanalog since that time... everything from the low-tech layout to Frank's quirky writing have remained the same over the course of thirty issues. It's tough to decide whether you'll find this consistency admirable or annoying, but in either case, you might want to check "Video Magic" out if you're itching to get your hands on some older games and aren't already doing business with Sean Kelly or Edward Villalpando. 🐉

Overkill #19

Rick Florey

First, the unpleasanties... what the hell is the deal with the cover!?

Sure, the very idea of the "Star Wars" rebels protesting the Empire with picket signs is amusing (very 90's!), but the drawing itself looks like it was done in black crayon by a ten year old. If this actually deserved first place in Rick Florey's (fake?) "Create-A-Cover" contest, I'd hate to see the entries that won booby prizes... Anyway. The rest of the issue is better, with everything you've come to expect from "Overkill": the "Doom" page, Shane Leonard's revelations about the card-based RPG "Magic: The Gathering", commentary by that Lagi guy... the full nine yards. Come to think of it, this is one of the fanzine's major flaws... there's very little to distinguish one issue of OK from another, since they all share the same basic format and columns. That's not to say that these columns aren't good, but a better variety of them (and more one-shot articles, like Rick's hilarious Space-Filler advertisement!) would help make each individual issue of "Overkill" stand out. 🐉

Slap-Dash #6

Russ Perry Jr.

If "Game Mag" tries too hard to please, "Slap-Dash" goes to the other extreme, being written by Russ Perry Jr., for Russ Perry Jr., with no outside contributors and a complete disregard for what others may think. This is both refreshing (I can't think of another fanzine that doesn't review games just because the editor doesn't like doing it) and extremely frustrating (I get the distinct feeling that Russ' suggestion box has a pedal and a flip-top lid...), but Russ' friendly and engaging writing style makes articles which shouldn't be interesting impossible to put down. However, this spellbinding charm doesn't save the issue's "conversations" with leading game designers from the 80's. The concept sounds really cool in theory, but Russ ruins it by reducing the interviews to pages and pages of raw facts. I was about to shoot myself by the time former Mattel Electronics employee James Hill revealed where the first 100,000 Intellivisions were manufactured... Of course, this is Russ's fanzine, and he's entitled to do what he likes with it. Besides, "Slap-Dash"'s overall quality more than makes up for its editor's occasional fits of self-indulgence. 🐉

DOMINION #8

Nate Hinline

I feel compelled to mention that I had two BIG problems with "Dominion". First, co-editor Mark Cullison is a complete idiot. His review of "Super Mario Kart 64" had nothing to do with the game itself and was littered with profanity and offensive "jokes" in a pathetic attempt to look subversive. Second, "Go Postal" is a breeding ground for posturing, self-absorbed assholes and pseudo-professional losers. Eric Longdin's letter was actually kind of cool, and Cory You's shameless self-promotion was amusingly naive, but "Everybody Hates" Andrew Romano's lovely comment that "The EG fanzine community doesn't mean shit here to us at Arkon" makes one wonder aloud why Timothy McVey didn't blow his town to hell instead. The rest of the fanzine is better, though... it reads like the love child of "Monty's Kitten" and "Infestation", and it's hard to knock a 'zine with such a strong pedigree. Let's just hope that Andrew and Mark aren't around to spoil the next issue... 🐉

MONITOR #2.2

DAVID WEINSTEIN, GREG ELWELL

Now published and co-edited by Greg Elwell, this 'zine by Sailor Moon fanatic David Weinstein has few improvements to show for it... there's still a gross overabundance of typos and grammatical errors, and the scanned images have all the clarity of your average mud puddle. You do have to give Dave-er, David points for honesty, though. He just tells you how he feels about the games and films he reviews, without subscribing to any particular pretense. It's pretty rare these days to find a fan-ed who's not trying to be the next Dennis Miller or Steve Harris... As for Greg Elwell, he definitely shows promise. His grasp of English is stronger than David's, which I hope will be a factor in future issues. Also, better use of available space and less of those worthless emoticons (I counted seven on the first page alone! Give it a rest, will 'ya!?) would definitely help the fanzine's appeal. Oh, and one more thing: give "Monitor" a mascot. Not a creepy

(continued on last page)



JOSH AND ZOE'S NOW PLAYING

Josh: Howdy, everyone, and welcome to "Josh and Zoe's Now Playing". The name of the column is an homage to (ripoff of) the one and only interesting column "Nintendo Power" magazine ever had. Anyone remember "George and Rob's Now Playing"? It wasn't THAT great, but to have any semblance of commentary in that infernal mag is a miracle. Of course, the articles proved to be a little too interesting for its tapioca-brained readers, so they ousted the column faster than you can say "Wilson Phillips". What is it about Nintendo loyalists that makes them so darn braindead anyway?

Zoe: Right now, we're listening to Sharon Apple's Cream P.U.F. soundtrack. For you non-otakus out there, Sharon Apple is an artificial intelligence entertainer in the "Macross Plus" anime. Her music is awesome, but it ultimately becomes responsible for zombifying all her fans (in the anime). Maybe whatever they put in Sharon's music has also been implemented in the games made by Nintendo.

Josh: Yeah, except that I'm one of the millions who have played "Super Mario 64" for 12 dozen hours, and I don't feel as if I've lost my free will and intelligence.

Zoe: True... that screws that theory.

Josh: "Tempest 2000", on the other hand...

Zoe: Uh, shouldn't we be introducing ourselves?

Josh: Yeah, sure... (ahem) My name's Joshua Lesnick, the former author of "Video Apocalypse", the only project I ever worked on that was remotely popular. I went by the name "MJ" when I wrote that 'zine, but I don't anymore, so don't call me that, or I'll kill you.

Zoe: And I'm Zoe. For those who've never known anyone named "Zoe", it's pronounced "Zoh-ee", not "Zoh". I was born in Josh's brain. I'm half-human and half-lizard, and I love fountain drinks. I'm obviously a fictional character, but Josh thinks I'm real.

Josh: Don't be so modest.

Zoe: You are quite insane, that you are. Aren't you going to mention to the readers that you love anime?

Josh: Oh yeah... I didn't mention that, did I?

Zoe: I think it would be very important that you'd mention that...

Josh: People, I am a complete and total otaku. All I do is watch anime, read manga, draw manga, and buy more anime merchandise than I can afford. I spent a couple years away from videogames so I could pursue this hobby of mine, but recently I've started playing games again. And me and my familiar are here to talk about them. Care to start, Zoe?

Zoe: "Street Fighter Alpha 2".

Josh: I do love that game.

Zoe: Considering how miraculous it is for you to enjoy a tourney fighter, it makes you wonder why more people don't play it.

Josh: I dunno... by the time "Super Street Fighter 2" came out, the general videogaming public finally got winded by all the "Street Fighter 2" rehashes. And apparently, they got so tired of the game that that's what they see SFA2 as... just another rehash.

Zoe: Yeah, "just a rehash" with completely different music, moves, animation...

Josh: I know! It's a sequel by all rights. I guess no one's fond of the overall lack of new characters and are annoyed by all the Ryu clones in the game. But give me a break... If that's a big problem, why hasn't anyone complained when "Mortal Kombat 3" was given only a few new characters and seven clones of "Scorpion"?

Zoe: Don't even mention the name of that game!!

Josh: What... "Mortal Kombat 3"?

Zoe: AHHHH!!!!!!!

Josh: Well, we'll get to that later. As some of you may know, I hated the original "Street Fighter 2" when it came out, so why do I like SFA2? I'm not really sure, actually, but I think it has something to do with Sakura.

Zoe: You're a sick puppy, Josh.

Josh: Yeah, yeah, so I have a thing for Japanese schoolgirl outfits... nothing wrong with that.

Zoe: So, if Pamela Lee wore one in the movie "Barb Wire", you probably would've watched it, eh?

Josh: Well, now that you mention it— Er, uhh, another thing I like about SFA2 is the anime-style graphics and cool noises it makes when you strike your opponent. A lot of people say that in the long run, graphics and sound have no effect on the actual gameplay, but I dunno... I think games like this tend to prove that statement wrong. And the cool alpha moves (usually) add some new skill to the game without becoming overly cheap.

Zoe: A lot of people have complained about the custom combos, but I don't know why. They don't do THAT much damage and they can be blocked pretty easily, though I HAVE seen you pull off some nasty ones using Chun Li.

Josh: Chun Li's a good character to flail around on the controller with. That's why she's the character I win most of my fights with.

Zoe: So basically, you're saying that Chun Li's a good choice for people who are lousy at this game?

Josh: Yeah, you could put it that way. Shut up.

Zoe: How 'bout "Magic Knight Rayearth" for the Saturn?

Josh: ワイイ! フォウテン スキ ヨ! ヒカル フ カワイイ ネコ ナス! フ*フ*!

Zoe: Okay... Anyway, this game's not that great for an RPG,

because-- and I am not exaggerating-- a majority of your game will be spent talking and listening to voices as opposed to actually doing anything. Still, if you're a fan of the manga and anime series by CLAMP and have access to and can afford imported Saturn games, it's in your destiny to buy this.

Josh: You don't HAVE to have access to imports, since Working Designs will be bringing the game to the US. But as much as I respect Ireland-sama, I can't recommend buying this version. Working Designs really does do a good job with their translations, but it's just not the same hearing the Magic Knights speak English. That's why I'm glad the dubbed TV series never made syndication.

Zoe: Kinda funny how all those videogame mags kept printing how the TV series was coming out "this fall" in the videogame descriptions, even though it's never going to happen.

Josh: That's right! Everyone, don't believe what EGM and others are printing... there will be no Rayearth TV series in the US this fall, nor will there ever be. And be glad. TMS finished quite a few translations of the show, and while it was all for naught, some people got a look at it on videotape, and no one liked it. Victor Ireland himself thought it was terrible. If you want to see the series the way it should be seen, search for "Silverwynd" on the WWW and order the fansub.

Zoe: Ah! Phil Collins!

Josh: Yeah, this musta been the 50th time I popped it in the CD player since I bought it two weeks ago. His new album really grew on me. Not as good as his "But Seriously" album, but still one of his best. Certainly a lot better than "Both Sides".

Zoe: Everyone go out and buy Phil Collins' new album "Dance Into The Light" right now! We're not being paid to say this!

Josh: Here's another one for the "insanely bad timing department": "Phantasy Star IV".

Zoe: That crazy Sega... "Phantasy Stars" II and III were chock full of little problems, then they release a near-flawless third sequel...

Josh: And just when you think they finally got things right...

Zoe: They go and release it AFTER the Genesis is clinically dead.

Josh: So no one bought it. And it's a shame... this really is the best RPG Sega's released so far. Everything you loved from "Phantasy Star II" (that was missing in "Phantasy Star III") is back in "Phantasy Star IV". And the game also contains something PSII never had...

Zoe: A plot?

Josh: Bingo! "Phantasy Star II" sure was hilarious, wasn't it? Some guy named Rolf (which is a really stupid-ass name for an RPG hero) walk around Motavia trying to fix the problems being caused by this "Mother Brain" machine which looked like it walked out of Brave New World. A cute bioengineered life-form gal named Nei tags along with Rolf at the beginning of the story, and winds up dying in an extremely confusing battle with her twin or something. Rolf dreams about Alis, the hero of "Phantasy Star I", twice, and it has nothing to do with the story. What a half-assed way to try to link the two plots together. I don't even want to get into the game's ending, or

the entire plot to "Phantasy Star III".

Zoe: It's obvious that Sega realized that PS3 was an utter mistake. It looks like some game companies ARE capable of learning from their mistakes after all. Not only did they use the same game engine as PS2, they barely mention PS3 in the plot at all. Thank Todd!

Josh: PSIV has actual dialogue, along with neat graphics during the intermissions. The plot is much easier to follow (there are no holes this time), and they even managed to patch up all the loose ends left by the past two games! I assure you people, you'll love the ending... it's the first PS game that actually left me with a feeling of satisfaction after completing it.

Zoe: They even managed to provide a valid explanation as to why you ALWAYS have to fight Dark Force at the end of each game! If that ain't impressive...

Josh: I don't know how they did it. And the gameplay, the graphics...

Zoe: They're exactly the same as "Phantasy Star II". The battles are the same, and while the graphics have improved, they have the same look. Techniques are used, the bosses are hard, the game looks, feels, and plays JUST like "Phantasy Star II"! Is this a good thing?

Josh: Sure it is! The only things that annoyed me about PS2 were the awful plot and its tendency to force you to hunt monsters for hours on end so you can afford weapons and stand a chance against the next boss. While the latter problem does show up a bit in PS4, it's not nearly as bad as 2 was. Genesis owners, buy this game.

Zoe: The Phil Collins CD is on its last track.

Josh: I love this one! Great cover of a Bob Dylan song.

Zoe: It goes to show you how slow you are at typing articles, doesn't it?

Josh: Yeah yeah yeah. I wonder how many pages I've typed so far. Jess probably won't print it all.

Zoe: Maybe we should stop.

Josh: Hell no! Let's see, what's next. Zoe, what's your pick for the best system so far?

Zoe: Same as yours, Josh... the Saturn.

Josh: Excellent!

Zoe: Er, remember, I'm a creation of yours. That means that virtually all my opinions match yours, you know.

Josh: Yeah, this column doesn't have quite the excitement of "Siskel & Ebert", does it?

Zoe: Perhaps you should consider getting a REAL co-author for this column?

Josh: But... you ARE real.

Zoe: (Sigh) Never mind. Anyway, we were talking about why we like the Saturn the most. My reasons for this are (gasp) exactly the same as Josh's!

Josh: Excuse me while I put on my "Mamono Hunter Yohko" CD...

Zoe: You're beginning to sound "Paradox"'s colophon!

Josh: Sorry. Continue.

Zoe: The reason we prefer the Saturn is--

Josh: And don't make fun of other fanzines.

Zoe: I'M not the one making fun of them... you're typing my

part of the article, you know!

Josh: No, I'm not.

Zoe: You're a nutcase, Josh. Aaaanyway, the reason we prefer the Saturn is--

Josh: Actually, I guess it WAS just good-natured ribbing. If Chris Johnston can't take a lighthearted joke like that, then he deserves to be pestered anyway.

Zoe: WILL YOU STOP INTERRUPTING ME?!

Josh: Touchy!

Zoe: Look, will you just promise to let me finish this one paragraph?

Josh: I promise.

Zoe: Really?

Josh: Cross my heart and hope to be forced to listen to "Hootie and The Blowfish".

Zoe: The reason we prefer the Saturn is--

Josh: Asuka Langley sure is cute...



Zoe: I was hoping we could make it through the article without me having to smash him with a statue of Buddha...

Josh: Duhh... fish heads, fish heads, roly poly fish heads...

Zoe: The reason we prefer the Saturn is quite simple... It's the system that will be getting all the RPGs in 1997... apparently. It's also the system that has the cute Japanese import game "Keio Yugekatai". That was reason enough to get Josh to buy it. There's also the matter of the Saturn simply running better than the PSX does. So what if the PSX will have "Final Fantasy VII"? We'll take the system which DOESN'T freeze up and hand us terrible access time, and the one which will have a dozen more RPGs for us, some of which just might possibly be as good as "Final Fantasy VII"!

Josh: You forgot to mention the Nintendo64, not that it really qualifies at the time we're typing this. Is it just me, or did the Super NES have a much better launch than this did?

Zoe: Gee, you sure recovered quickly.

Josh: Yeah, I tend to recover fast when I'm hit with a fictional object.

Zoe: But I thought you said I was real.

Josh: YOU are, but the Buddha statue wasn't.

Zoe: Uh huh. At any rate, you're rate about the N64. With less than ten games out at the time this article was written, I can't help but wonder how Nintendo managed to sell ANY units, much less one hundred thousand in one day. At least the Super NES had "Final Fantasy II" by Christmas! So far, the only N64 game worth playing is "Super Mario 64"!

Josh: I hear "Wave Race 64" is a good game too. And at least there's "Super Mario 64" which may keep players busy until the system finally gets more games.

Zoe: True... Nintendo couldn't have done much better than "Super Mario 64". And the greatest thing about it is seeing all the pathetic attempts other companies have made to compete with this game. "NiGHTS"? "Crash Bandicoot"? "Bubsy 3-D"? Ugh!

Josh: "NiGHTS" is OK.

Zoe: No, it's not.

Josh: There, see? We disagree on something!

Zoe: Have you ever come close to getting an "A" or "B" on that damn game?! And the weirdass graphics and controls! That game shoulda come with an icepack instead of an analog controller!

Josh: Hmm... you're right. And the game DOES have the lasting appeal of slapping a walrus. Maybe it DOES suck.

Zoe: So much for disagreeing on something.

Josh: We agree on "Mortal Kombat 3" too.

Zoe: Must we?

Josh: Let's just quickly mention to all the fans of this game that they're a bunch of imbeciles and leave it at that.

Zoe: I concur. I believe we have the same message for fans of "Tempest 2000"?

Josh: Yes. And let me add something. A while back, I rashly criticized the game in the last issue of "Fantazine", before I even got a chance to play it. I admit that this uninformed conjecture wasn't exactly the best of ideas. However, I have gotten a chance to play the PC version since then, and it turns out that everything I said was true anyway. It's just the original "Tempest" with filled-in polygons, some powerups, and a bunch of glitter which obscures the entire playing area. I don't think even Steven Hawking can get past the third level of this game. It may take a genius like him to scientifically decipher why the entire videogame fandom was drooling over this game when it came out for the Jaguar. My review in "Fantazine" was conjecture, but it was good conjecture. I have been vindicated.

Zoe: Do you know what the word "vindicated" means?

Josh: Not really. Well, as much as I would like to blab on about games such as "Quake" and "Puzzle De Pon", we really should call it quits. Say goodnight, Zoe.

Zoe: I refuse to do that stupid line.

Josh: Good for you. So long, everybody!

Josh Lesnick, everybody. Give him a hand. If you'd like to know more about him and his 37 other personalities, check out the Abunai-Neko web site at <http://lonestar.texas.net/~doki>.

THE RE-VIEW MIRROR

All reviews by Jess Ragan unless otherwise noted

Bill Suzsynski reviews...

Ultimate Qix Genesis

Being a fan of the original (and having previously owned the NES version of "Qix"), I was really looking forward to playing "Ultimate Qix", and was very pleased with the improvements over any other version of the game I've played.

The plot is simple, really: Draw lines, score points, avoid the Sparx and the Qix himself. One of the first improvements I'd noticed were the bitchin' backgrounds that were added to soup up this version of "Qix". Some are neat, some are weird, and some are just really bizarre. The sounds have also been improved and add even more to this already great translation. It kinda makes me wonder why Atari didn't release a version of "Ultimate Qix" for the Jaguar...

Here's the bottom line. If you don't already own an Atari 5200 or NES (good luck finding the NES version of "Qix". VERY rare!), definitely look into "Ultimate Qix". Not only is it a great find, but it's also an excellent game that would make the original arcade version green with envy. ®



Konami was never what you'd call a strong supporter of the Genesis, and as a result, most of its releases for that system looked and felt like afterthoughts. Nevertheless, I had high hopes for "Castlevania:Bloodlines"... it was widely praised at the 1993 Summer Consumer Electronics Show, and with the addition of blood, gore, and strange new special effects, I reasoned that it would be at the very least a vast improvement over the disappointing "Super Castlevania IV". I was at least partially right: "Bloodlines" sticks more rigidly to the original "Castlevania" formula than its Super NES counterpart had, but it too falls short of the standards set by the first games in the series. Konami tried its best to hide this with gimmicky special effects, but they actually

do more to distract and annoy the player than entertain him in tight situations. I could give you nearly a dozen examples of this, but my (ahem) "favorite" is near the end of the game, where the screen is split into five sections which all scroll at different speeds. Since you can't really see where you're going, you've got to waste life after life tumbling into pits before you've memorized the layout of the round. To its credit, "Bloodlines" looks, sounds, and plays well enough to satisfy most Genesis owners, but "Castlevania" fans who expect nothing but perfection from the series won't consider this a worthy successor to "Dracula's Curse". ®

Super Mario 64 Nintendo 64

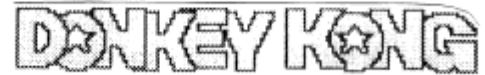
This game's power over people never fails to amaze and annoy me. Everyone from "Time" to "Next Generation" has called Nintendo's overhyped and undersupported Nintendo 64 was "The Best Game System of the Year" after playing "Super Mario 64" briefly, and even some fan-ed's have fallen under its spell, slathering the game with praise after giving it a quick test drive at their favorite retail outlets. The problem is, SM64 is one of those games you can't judge from a first impression. Sure, it'll suck you in with its terrific graphics and gameplay at first, but after an hour or so, you'll begin to notice that poor Mario has tumbled into bottomless chasms and pools of molten lava a great deal more often than necessary. And after a couple more hours, you'll begin to question your own sanity after Mario careens off the ice slide in the Snowy Mountains stage and squeals "Mama Mia!" for what seems like the sixteen thousandth time. So, if you're absolutely convinced that you should buy an N64 after playing "Super Mario 64" for fifteen minutes, it's obvious that you haven't played it long enough. ®



NES

I was mesmerized by "Arkanoid"'s addictive gameplay and detailed, high-tech graphics when it first hit arcades in 1986, so

when Taito announced an NES version of this terrific "Breakout" derivative, it was only natural that I'd be the first in line to buy it. Back then, the game seemed like a flawless conversion of the arcade original, but after ten years of sequels, translations, and shareware rip-offs, "Arkanoid" on the NES is finally beginning to show some grey hairs. Maybe it's the fault of my NES emulator... some games don't sound and feel quite like they should when running them from my increasingly outdated 486. Perhaps it's the lack of Taito's ingenious dial controller, which added that much more to the game's arcade feel. Or maybe I'm just too cynical for my own good and should accept "Arkanoid" for what it is: a decade old NES game which couldn't hope to compare to the dozens of glossy clones available on the Internet. Whatever's the case, "Arkanoid" is a fair translation and is worth looking into if you're a fan of the series, all the more so if you can find it with the aforementioned dial controller. ®



Game Boy

Although the GameBoy wouldn't exactly have been my system of choice for a "Donkey Kong" revival, I'm thankful that one was released at all before Nintendo and RARE sullied the series' good name with the ridiculous "Donkey Kong Country" franchise. Originally planned as "The Return of Donkey Kong" for the NES, this rather loose conversion has all four rounds from the original plus dozens of challenging new stages and some intense battles with the big ape himself. The game's first four stages were added mostly for nostalgic purposes and don't do much for its appeal, but GBDK really picks up when you move on to the puzzle rounds, which are not only fun and challenging but are strangely reminiscent of those ancient Game+Watches Nintendo used to make. The boss battles are great, too... it's the first time Mario ever had the chance to turn the tables on Donkey Kong by throwing his barrels back at him! There's no doubt about it: this is the only GameBoy title that deserves to be called "Donkey Kong". ®

Super Pitfall NES

Most of the reviews in this issue have been positive, and for good reason: companies took a huge risk in the 80's and early 90's by releasing games based on old favorites. Nostalgia wasn't a popular commodity in those days, and no self-respecting NES owner would dare soil his hands with a rehashed 2600 game if

it couldn't stand on its own merits. You'd think that Activision, one of the few survivors of the video game crash of 1984, would understand this better than anyone, but "Super Pitfall" is proof that the company learned nothing from its brush with death. Programmed by Pony Canyon with no apparent input from David Crane, this miserable side-scrolling action game is hardly a worthy successor to the "Pitfall!" series, let alone a super one as the title indicates. In many ways, it's actually a step down from the 2600 games... Pitfall Harry has somehow went from a dashing adventurer with a shock of red hair to what appears to be Mario's spellunking stunt double, and the simple but effective jungle scenery from the first "Pitfall" has been replaced by those all-too-familiar Nintendo™ brand tiled backgrounds. Even the quest itself isn't as much fun... because the game's various objectives are so cryptic and its underground mazes are so convoluted, it's almost a guarantee that you'll lose interest before you even come close to rescuing your niece and her pet lion from certain doom. It's doubtful at best that anyone's bothered to try since the release of the infinitely better "Pitfall: The Lost Adventures"... ☉

SOLARIS ATARI 2600

You wouldn't expect a remade classic like this one to be designed exclusively for the 2600, but then again, Atari was just full of surprises back in 1987. Who could possibly have imagined that the Tramiels would reintroduce the ancient VCS at a time when two vastly superior game systems dominated the market? Even at the low, low price of \$49.95, Atari knew the 2600 would be doomed if it didn't release software that stretched the system's limits to their very furthest. Many wonderful games were released as a result of this logic, but "Solaris" is easily the best of the bunch. Designed by "Star Raiders" creator Douglas Neubauer, "Solaris" takes the vast environment of its predecessor and adds intense first-person action scenes which blow the doors off anything the 2600 has done before. Hell, I'd go as far as to call "Solaris" incredible 3D perspective more convincing than that of most NES games! Tack on some great aerial dogfights and a remarkable level of depth and you've got what could quite possibly be the best 2600 game ever released. ☉

❄ Penguin Adventure ❄ MSX

So, you've just become the first penguin in history to make it around the rim of

the Arctic Circle in eighty days. What are you going to do next?

- A. Go to Disneyland
- B. Star in one of those freaky Bud Ice ads
- C. Save your girlfriend in a much improved sequel to the amazing ColecoVision game "Antarctic Adventure"

If you picked C, congratulations! You get a crack at this excellent MSX exclusive release, which takes the amazing first-person perspective of "Antarctic Adventure" and adds multiple play environments (there are forests and caves now, and they look even better than the first game's glacial trails) and some wild bonus rounds which send you hurtling through outer space. Of course, being a beefed-up classic, there are boss encounters and power-ups as well. Neither add all that much to the experience, but the power-ups do come in handy in later rounds (that cloud is a real life-saver!) and there are more helpful items you can buy if you're lucky enough to stumble across a shop. Unfortunately, you'll probably never find one because the game's later stages are very challenging, and there's (apparently) no way to continue after you've lost all your lives. There may never be a happy ending to this adventure for most players, but it's still one that's very much worth having. ☉

Mappy-Land NES

As unplayable as "Pac-Land" was, you've got to admit that it was a necessary step forward in the evolution of the Pac-Man character. After all, it was 1984, one short year before the release of the NES. With "Super Mario Bros." just around the corner, Namco knew a lemon yellow disk with a wedge-shaped mouth wasn't going to cut it as the company's mascot. "Pac-Land" wasn't much of a game, but it did serve Namco's purpose in making Pac-Man a more personable, identifiable character. "Mappy-Land" seems to take the opposite approach: very little is revealed about everyone's favorite Micro Policeman, and the wafer-thin plot is straight out of "Ms. Pac-Man" (Mappy's got to scurry around collecting knick-knacks for a girlfriend and, after the two marry, his bratty son Junior), but the game itself is a legitimate extension of the series, with over a dozen rounds and even more of the wacky traps that made "Mappy" so fun. And by more, I mean a lot more. From cannons to pulleys to bombs, there's never been more ways to skin a cat! Mappy can even arm himself with such distractions as radios and switches, cutting down on that feeling of helplessness that hurt the original game's appeal. There are downsides, of course: it's not as addictive as "Mappy", and your interior decorator would

shriek if he saw the game's freakishly colored backgrounds, but less picky players will still have a ball with "Mappy-Land". ☉

Q*Bert 3 Super NES

It's hard to write a review of this game without mentioning the mind-bending backgrounds... they're easily the most impressive use of the Super NES' powerful graphics engine I've ever seen. With all their freaky patterns and rotating objects, you get the distinct feeling that the programmers designed them while taste-testing stamps they'd collected at a Grateful Dead concert... All distractions aside, "Q*Bert 3" is a surprisingly good sequel to both "Q*Bert" and the elusive "Q*Bert's Qubes". Unlike the other games reviewed here, "Q*Bert 3" is extremely faithful to the original where gameplay is concerned... each round has a different layout, there's one new enemy, and some stages have been garnished with bonus prizes, but you won't find any substantial changes to the basic "Q*Bert" theme here. The graphics are an entirely different story, however... you start on the traditional cube-based playfield, but later rounds bring all sorts of weird environments, including rows of teeth which decay as Q*Bert steps on them. It's all very surreal, which most "Q*Bert" fans will tell you is just how they like it. There are downsides that even they will find hard to swallow, however... the game feels a little sluggish, and although there are several control options, none of them work all that well. Despite these flaws, you're going to want this in your collection if you have fond memories of "Q*Bert", or just want to experience all the cool side effects of LSD without the bad trips and criminal record. ☉

MIGHTY BOMB JACK NES

To me, this game was one of the strangest mysteries of the 1980's... y'know, kinda like "Where's the beef?" or the popularity of bands like Guns 'N Roses and Van Halen. I had no idea what it was like or how it played, and to make matters worse, I never had a chance to try it out until I'd sold my NES to buy a Genesis in 1991. I'd had a nagging curiosity about "Mighty Bomb Jack" since that transaction took place, and was relieved to find an emulated version of the game that inspired it. My countless hours with Tehkan's "Bomb

Jack" answered a lot of pressing questions about the series, but posed another: "I was pretty impressed with plain old 'Bomb Jack'... just what makes the NES version so mighty?" The answer, unfortunately, is nothing. "Mighty Bomb Jack" has all the power-ups and scrolling playfields that you'd expect from a refurbished classic on the NES, but it doesn't necessarily make it a better game. In fact, MBJ feels more confining than its arcade counterpart, since its Egyptian setting never changes and the backgrounds in each stage are very plain and indistinct. Tecmo deserves credit for adding what I like to call "nostalgia rounds" at the end of each stage (these are small rooms with layouts lifted straight from the original "Bomb Jack"), but they have the unfortunate side effect of making the rest of "Mighty Bomb Jack" seem contrived and pointless. I guess what they say about bombs is equally true about "Bomb Jack": both aren't worth tampering with unless you really know what you're doing. ©

Space Invaders '91

Genesis

There's always been one constant in the world of video games... sinister aliens which pose an imminent threat to mankind. Since "Space Invaders" pioneered this overused sci-fi plot, it makes sense that one of the best ways to relieve your xenophobic tendencies is with its supercharged sequel. "Space Invaders '91" is a textbook example of how a redone classic should be made... it perfectly balances the mindlessly addictive gameplay of "Space Invaders" with the spellbinding graphics, smooth gameplay, and inventive power-ups of the Genesis' very best games. The power-ups (which include homing shots, shields, and a really cool wide beam which can wipe out an entire alien armada when properly charged) add greatly to the game's strategic element, and the tromping of alien feet has been replaced with terrific background music that will mesmerize and inspire you like no other Genesis game soundtrack has. If you hated the original, I can guarantee that SI '91 will change the way you look at "Space Invaders". ©



GENESIS

People have complained that this unique side-scrolling adventure has nothing to do with the first game, but in its defense, "Pac-Man 2" does give you an idea of what it's like to be the big yellow one. Armed with a slingshot, you've got to keep Pac-Man in good spirits as he travels around Pac-Land, hunting down gifts for his friends and family (gee, and it's not even

Christmas!). It's a little like the classic puzzler "Lemmings", but Pac-Man's various reactions to situations is what makes this game unique. In fact, the Pacster is such an emotionally complex character, you'll probably catch yourself talking to him more than once! What's that? Well, I guess, but screaming death threats at Bubsy doesn't really count... If this isn't your cup of tea, you can always enter the Pac-Land arcade for a quick game of the original "Pac-Man", or an odd hack of "Ms. Pac-Man" starring Pac-Man's son. They aren't perfect translations, but they do make nice diversions for when the actual quest gets boring. In any event, "Pac-Man 2" is strongly recommended for those of you who miss the cartoon or still have burning questions about Pac-Man and his family. ©

Galaga '91

Game Gear

To me, "Galaga '90" for the TurboGraphx-16 was an unwelcome departure from the previous games in the series. I absolutely hated its new character designs and cliched vertically scrolling stages, but oddly enough, this didn't stop me from downloading this Game Gear adaptation. Due to its downscaled graphics, you'd expect "Galaga '91" to be a step down from its TG-16 counterpart, but the less intense backgrounds and simpler sprites actually work to its advantage, as they're far less distracting than before. The limitations of the Game Gear hardware do detract from the game as well: the screens are overcrowded thanks to the size of the characters, and the sound effects are straight out of "Galaga" for the 7800, but 1991 remains a fine year for this eternally popular Namco classic. ©

METAL SLUG

NEO-GEO

Don't get me wrong... I have no problem with most of SNK's 10,000 or so fighting games, but "Metal Slug" is the most fun I've had with a Neo-Geo in a long, loooooong time. Slug was obviously inspired by the cult classic "Gunstar Heroes" (if the humorously animated characters don't convince you of this, nothing will!), but its designers went one step further by borrowing elements from "Ikari Warriors", "Nam 75", "Cyber-Lip", "Rush 'n Attack" and even the animated feature "Dominion Tank Police", keeping what could have been another cheap "Contra" knock-off fresh and exciting. Incredible attention to detail, gorgeous graphics, and (most importantly) tons of stuff to blow up make this the best side-scrolling shooter of '96 AND '97. Now, if SNK would just stop making those blasted "Samurai Shodown" games, all would be right with the world... ©

AND NOW. THE REVIEW
YOU'VE ALL BEEN WAITING FOR...

GG
FROGGER

Game Gear

I always wondered why the boneheads at Sega passed on releasing this wonderful in-house project, but if the rumors I've heard are true, they may not have had a choice in the matter. According to Mike Palisano and Russ Perry, Jr., Universal Pictures bought the rights to "Frogger" in the early 80's, when video games were still a hot property. After the crash of 1984, Universal deep-sixed the idea of a "Frogger" film (thankfully! If there's one live-action movie that had the potential to be worse than "Street Fighter"...), but held onto the license just long enough to prevent Sega from releasing a new version of the game ten years later, around the time Matsushita (Universal Pictures' parent company) bought a controlling interest in the 3DO. It's a moot point now that both the 3DO and Game Gear are dead, but it's still a shame that such a terrific sequel to "Frogger" would be left unreleased due to petty legal squabbles...

I've wasted a lot of space on this review's opener, so let's get right to the point: This game expands on the "Frogger" theme with inventive new play mechanics and incredible graphics. Unlike the original, each round takes place on a huge scrolling playfield, with three small orange toads hidden throughout. Your job is to locate each of your fellow amphibians and, in an ironic twist, bring them back to a small cabin at the beginning of the round. On your way to the toads, you'll be forced to cross dangerous rivers and congested streets, but luckily, there are hidden items to keep you from feeling too overwhelmed. It's all surprisingly complex, a nice change of pace from the first two games in the series.

This is all well and good, but what would a "Frogger" game be without charming graphics and sound? Yes, Josh, it would probably be "Frogger 2: ThreeDeep!", but the point I was trying to make is that GG "Frogger" one-ups the arcade original with vibrant backgrounds and highly detailed, almost three-dimensional sprites. Unfortunately, "Frogger"'s soundtrack doesn't compare favorably to the arcade original's... the music itself is tolerable, but it doesn't make much sense to have it play over and over without congratulatory tunes to keep the player encouraged. Otherwise, this (very!) limited edition of "Frogger" is a worthy sequel and one of the best titles the Game Gear has to offer. Keep your eyes peeled for the ROM image if someone's kind enough to distribute it on the Internet. ©

HALF ASS

"The Suspiciously Familiar Column of Miscellaneous Crap"

Before I begin, I'd better let everyone know that I have clearance from Russ Perry, Jr. to do this parody/outright rip-off of the various articles in his own fanzine "Slap-Dash". Hell, he even made suggestions as to what the "Half-Ass" logo should look like, but, er, for his sake, I won't go into too much detail about that...

Talk about deja vu! I recently went to my local library to interloan more video game books for "El Libro", only to discover the existence of a video game utility called MagiCard for the Sega Genesis. As you may recall, MagiCard is also an extremely rare cartridge for the Atari 2600 by CommaVid which allows you to program games in machine language. While MagiCard for the Genesis is nothing that special (it's just a game hack device similar to the Game Genie and Pro Action Replay), it does make you wonder if anyone from CommaVid had anything to do with it...

I'm guessing that very few of you still bother with Tiger's handheld games. With that said, I hope you won't blow off the company's latest gadget, "Word Chaos". Remember the old crossword game played with dice, "Boggle"? Well, "Word Chaos" plays a lot like it, except the letter jumbles are randomly generated and the letters you select don't have to be adjacent to one another. The coolest thing about "Word Chaos" is that you can actually pick letters from the jumble by touching them. The touch-sensitive screen is by no means as accurate as those available on personal data assistants like Apple's Newton, but to include one in a handheld game at all is just too cool for words.

After Ellen DeGeneres' recent announcement that she is, in fact, gay, I figured now would be the time to air a dirty little secret that one of Nintendo's star licensees would probably want to keep quiet. Does anyone remember "Bomb Jack"? This plucky little super hero was the star of his own arcade game, and later went on to appear in the NES carts "Mighty Bomb Jack" and "Solomon's Key". The odd thing about this is that both of these titles were released by Tecmo, famous for the "Ninja Gaiden" series; yet the arcade version of "Bomb Jack" was accredited to Tehkan, infamous for "Pleiades" (the butchered version of Centuri's "Phoenix") and licensing titles like "Funky Fish" to Emerson's awful Arcadia 2001 system. Obviously, this can only mean one thing: Tehkan IS Tecmo!

Did any of you see Tyrone Rodriguez' coverage of the elusive shooter "Rabbit Punch" in the April issue of "Tips & Tricks"? Although at two pages, it wasn't as detailed as the magazine's other walk-throughs, it was nevertheless cool to see the game get its proper due in a professional magazine. However, it looked as though one of the drawings Ty had done for the feature was a little too detailed... Check out the male rabbit to the right of the article's header to see what I mean. Ewww!!! Yep, this is a Larry Flynt publication, all right...

On the subject of unpleasant content in video games, it's odd that the Saturn version of Gex was given a General Audience rating by the Video Game Rating Commission, especially with the allusions to sex that are made throughout the game and its instruction booklet. I mean, there's much to be said for plot outlining in video games, but the manual tells players more than they ever wanted to know about Gex, including his "running errands for frustrated housewives" to make ends meet (no pun intended). Even worse, if you take too long to complete a round, Dana Gould (the voice of Gex) complains, "Well, that was about as fun as sharing a prison cell with Mike Tyson on Valentine's Day..." Yeesh! I can forgive Crystal Dynamics for this (largely because Gould barks "That's for 12 years of 'Full House!'" whenever Gex destroys television sets!), but still feel that "Gex" should have earned an MA-13 rating for this kind of explicit content.

What's the deal with this Game.Com thingee? On one hand, it's more powerful than the Game Boy, has a touch sensitive screen (mmm... touch sensitive screen...), and can even be hooked up to the Internet, but... it's black and white. Am I missing something here? With some surprisingly strong third-party support and tons of licensed properties under its belt, Game.Com is going to be awfully hard to ignore, but I get this strange feeling that Tiger Electronics (which has only had previous experience with simple electronic toys and games... and yes, Russ, a handful of 2600 releases, too) is way out of its league here. Hell, I'm not even sure if there's a market for portable game systems anymore...

Russ Perry gave lip service to hardware emulation and game adaptors in an old issue of "Slap-Dash", and it got me thinking about the guy who wrote a ColecoVision hardware emulator designed specifically for use inside a software emulator, fMSX (you still following me here?). Wouldn't it just be incredibly cool if we could get him to write a similar hardware emulator for MASSAGE, then find someone who'd be willing to convert it into an adaptor for use with an actual Game Gear? Poof! You could play everything from "Antarctic Adventure" to "Escape from the Mindmaster" on the go! Or, if you prefer, you could design a 2600 adaptor for the Lynx, since both systems have the same processor and screen resolution. Best of all, there's the prospect of porting MSX games like "Nemesis", "Bosconian" and "Penguin Adventure" to the ColecoVision, or the coin-op version of "Nemesis" to the Genesis, or arcade games with Z80A processors to the Game Gear... I tell you, the possibilities are endless!

The Top 100 Games Of All Time!

Part 1

Well, an article praising my one hundred favorite video games turned out to be a taller order than I'd expected... not only will this column be in three installments, but I have to use this eye-straining eight point type just to cram the first thirty-five games into this double issue! Honestly, I don't know how Rick managed to do it...

Speaking of Rick Florey, I hope nobody mistakes this as a rip-off of a very similar article in the anniversary issue of his fanzine, "Overkill". I'd planned to do this since the first issue of "The Gameraoom Blitz", but thanks to my recent addiction to emulators and various circumstances that actually were beyond my control, Rick was able to beat me to the punch with his own list of games.

No matter. I'm not in any sort of competition with Rick, so if you prefer his list to mine, that's OK. In fact, I encourage you to compare our choices and decide for yourself whose reviews were closest to the mark, or if we're both full of it... :D And now, our feature presentation, brought to you without commercial interruptions.

Super Mario Bros. (NES, arcade)

Contrary to popular belief, "Super Mario Bros." is not the first game of its kind, but it deserves just as much credit for taking the basic concepts in "Pac-Land" and improving them tenfold. If you've played the game to death on your NES, give the arcade version a try... it's far more challenging.

Super Mario World (SNES)

Without the variety and power-ups that made "Super Mario Bros. 3" a classic, how could "Super Mario World" possibly compare to it? Somehow, it manages, with some of the best music ever in a Super NES game and tons of well-designed, interconnected levels.

Super Mario 64 (N64)

The three-dimensional perspective can be both a blessing and a curse, but "Super Mario 64" has more depth than any of its competitors, and smoother graphics to boot.

Bomberman '94/Mega Bomberman (Turbo, Genesis)

It's a pity that so few people will be able to experience "Bomberman '94", arguably the best installment in Hudson's popular "Bomberman" series. The Genesis conversion, "Mega Bomberman", is an acceptable substitute, but seems watered down in comparison, with too much slowdown (what the hell?) and most of the original game's special effects removed.

Galaga (arcade, NES)

There's a certain flawless beauty to "Galaga" which has made it a permanent fixture in arcades across the country. Could it be the innovative yet understated play mechanics? The entrancing music and realistic sound effects? Or the graceful patterns of the enemies in flight? Whatever it is, there's no doubt that "Galaga" will remain in arcades for at least another decade.

Pac-Man (arcade)

Industry leaders called Namco's "Pac-Man" a stinker when it was first unveiled at the 1980 Consumer Electronic Show. Can we consider the dozens of shameless clones they'd released two years later an apology for their lack of foresight?

1943 (arcade, NES)

It's odd that a World War II game from our perspective would be released by a Japanese company, but you don't get much time to think about that when you're fighting to stay alive against a

battalion of kamikaze planes and gigantic, heavily armed aircraft carriers. Maybe Capcom was trying to make the point that Japan wasn't as easy to defeat as we'd tend to believe...?

Legend of the Mystical Ninja (SNES)

Titled "Goemon" overseas, this side-scrolling action title is an unexpected treat for both video game devotees and fans of Japanese culture. The game itself is fairly straightforward- anyone who's beaten "Zelda" or its sequels will blow through it in a matter of days- but the hidden extras and mini-games keep "Legend of the Mystical Ninja" from becoming too stale.

Solaris (2600)

Douglas Neubauer's inspired sequel to "Star Raiders" doesn't just break ground on Atari's decrepit VCS; it shatters it! The 3D effects in "Solaris" are actually more convincing than those in some NES games, and its devious level design and sheer difficulty will keep you entertained (aggravated?) for weeks on end. When was the last time you could say that about a 2600 game?

Wizard of Wor (arcade, 5200, 400/800)

Even more so than "Escape from the Mindmaster" or the original "Wolfenstein", Bob Ogden's intense and somewhat disturbing classic "Wizard of Wor" has to be what most inspired the immensely popular series of "Doom" games. It has the same suspenseful gameplay, with monsters hidden around every corner and a treacherous "partner" you'd be wise not to trust.

Adventure (2600)

It's not presented in the eye-popping splendor that made 2600 titles like "Yar's Revenge" and "Midnight Magic" favorites, but "Adventure" is still memorable- and very important to the history of the hobby- because it introduced a new level of play depth to video games.

Gunstar Heroes (Genesis, Game Gear)

They say that "imitation is the sincerest form of flattery". With that said, the designers of this excellent "Contra" derivative shouldn't be too depressed about its poor sales in the U.S., as "Gunstar Heroes" is quite possibly the most "flattered" game released since "Super Mario Bros." You'd have to take off your shoes to count the number of unworthy titles which stole rabbits from "Gunstar Heroes"'s magic hat, but none of these wannabees come close to the real thing.

Street Fighter 2 Championship Edition (arcade, Genesis)

It's no secret that I didn't like the original "Street Fighter 2" when it was first released, but it didn't take me long to figure out that it and the improved Championship Edition were light years ahead of the gimmicky but clumsily designed "Mortal Kombat"...

Q*Bert 3 (SNES)

Another one of those great classic remakes which retain the charm of the original while improving greatly on its basic gameplay and graphics. The mindbending backgrounds are some of the most impressive ever on the SNES and add greatly to an already surreal game.

Ridge Racer (Playstation)

As Dionne Warwick would say, "Ridge Racer" is the "khcccreme de la khcccreme" of driving simulations. The texture-mapped decals on the cars are truly a thing of beauty, and the gameplay, while a bit basic and somewhat imprecise, blows the doors off similar games like "Daytona USA" and "WipEouf". Too bad the sequels don't live up to RR's high standards...

Fatal Fury (Neo*Geo)

It was this game, not the much lauded "Street Fighter 2", which helped introduce me to the basic concepts of tournament fighting games. Sure, the emphasis on plot and background interaction harms the game's balance, but who the hell cares? SNK obviously designed "Fatal Fury" to be more than just a cheap clone of SF2, and it shows.

Sonic the Hedgehog (Genesis)

Admittedly, the Sonic games are more flash than substance, and don't hold up to repeated playing the way the "Super Mario Bros." series does, but they're still a lot of fun the first time around. Besides, it was sure nice to play a side-scrolling platformer that was genuinely different from "Super Mario Bros." after five monotonous years of punching blocks...

Sonic 3-D Blast (Genesis)

After the impressive but mind-numbingly simplistic "Toy Story", it was refreshing to see Travellers' Tales release something that both stretched the limits of the Genesis and was entertaining for more than ten minutes. With a perspective similar to the ones in "Marble Madness" and "Crystal Castles", you can't help but wonder if the game would be even better with a trackball...

Darkstalkers/Nightwarriors (arcade, Saturn)

Nothing I can say here could possibly do justice to this absolutely incredible title. Never mind other video games... the artwork in "Darkstalkers" is far beyond the standards of most Saturday morning cartoons, with silky smooth animation and gorgeous hand-painted backgrounds.

Street Fighter Alpha 2 (arcade, Saturn)

Unimaginative but nevertheless entertaining, "Street Fighter Alpha 2" has the dubious distinction of being the best fighting game you've already played.

Virtua Fighter 2 (Saturn)

Let the record state that I absolutely LOATHE 3-D fighting games. Nevertheless, "Virtua Fighter 2" deserves credit here because it is the best game of its kind (which isn't saying much...), and because it does things with the Saturn hardware that people thought were impossible.

Super Mario Kart (SNES)

It's cute, looks nice, and is very challenging, but the best thing about "Super Mario Kart" is that it offers players freedom of movement, something that was unheard of in racing titles of the time. As dumb as it is to go backwards in a game like this, it seems even dumber that you can't in Sega's "Outrun" and "Super Monaco GP".

Super Metroid (SNES)

If you loved "Metroid", teleport, don't run, to your nearest pawn shop or department store and buy this incredible sequel. The Super NES probably wouldn't have even needed "Street Fighter 2" to come out on top in the 16-bit wars if this had been one of the system's first releases.

Operation: Wolf (arcade)

Easily the most convincing war-themed game of its time, "Operation:Wolf" also scores points for being superior to the silly digitized first-person shooters released eight years later.

Mega Man (NES)

One of the first games to really stretch the limits of the NES. It's a little primitive in some respects when you compare it to the sequels, but the graphics are more painstakingly shaded, giving each level a convincing metallic look that helps validate the "machines gone mad" plot.

Ninja Gaiden (arcade, Lynx)

After Tecmo's NES bastardization of "Ninja Gaiden", I thought for certain that there'd never be a real translation of the arcade hit. For a change, I'm glad I was wrong... the Lynx version of "Ninja Gaiden" isn't an entirely perfect conversion, but at least it plays like the original- a cleverly designed "Double Dragon" clone- instead of a simpering "Castlevania" knock-off.

Blue Lightning (Lynx)

When your game system looks like an oversized dress shield, the only way you're going to keep players from noticing is to release

great games for it, and tons of them. Atari never got the tons part down pat, but Epyx's "Blue Lightning" is proof that things weren't all bad for this potent portable.

Roadblasters (Lynx)

Another arcade conversion on the Lynx that surpasses all others, "Roadblasters" forces the question, "Why the hell did I ever buy a GameBoy?" In addition to playing well, "Roadblasters" has a totally convincing illusion of depth which makes it that much more addicting.

Duke Nukem 3-D (PC)

There are dozens of "Doom" clones available for personal computers, but only "Duke Nukem 3-D" has what it takes to end up on top of this atomic pile. It's refreshing to have a game on the market that claims to be 3-D, and actually is.

Final Fight (arcade, SNES, Sega CD)

Leave it to Capcom to take the concepts first explored in "Double Dragon" and improve them tenfold, with better control, huge characters, and pristinely detailed graphics. A true classic that's just as fun now as it was eight years ago.

Omega Race (VIC-20)

The menace of the Bally/Midway coin-op was captured perfectly in this astounding VIC-20 release. The programmers even emulated the vector graphics of the original, resulting in a sterling translation and one of the best "Asteroids" clones on the market at the time.

Chiki Chiki Boys (Genesis)

I've always had a place in my heart for games like this- Japanese side-scrollers so cute, they should come with a warning from the American Dental Association. "Chiki Chiki Boys" won't stop any hearts or drop any jaws, but it is a lot of good, clean fun, and that's what counts.

Penguin Adventure (MSX)

"Antarctic Adventure" was widely regarded as the best game on the ColecoVision with a first-person perspective, and "Penguin Adventure" continues that tradition with a variety of environments (there are forests and caves in addition to the first game's ice floes), power-ups, freaky bonus rounds, and an impressive Konami™ brand soundtrack.

Castlevania 3 (NES)

Even with the Super NES and Genesis versions around, this remains the apex of the "Castlevania" series (at least in the United States...). With its new cast of characters and terrific backgrounds, "Dracula's Curse" almost makes you forget about the disasterously misconceived "Simon's Quest".

Smash TV (SNES)

This ambitious translation was stripped down graphically (Nintendo deserves part of the blame for this, thanks to their stringent policies on video game content) but is otherwise very close to the arcade version, with no slowdown whatsoever and next to no flicker. Stay the hell away from the horrible Genesis version!

Solomon's Key (NES)

What's most ironic about this overlooked cult classic is that it was released two years before the NES version of "Tetris", yet still manages to make today's puzzlers seem about as complex as your average game of Tic-Tac-Toe. A terrific bone to chew on for seasoned players looking for a long-term challenge.

Streets of Rage 2 (Genesis)

I never quite understood why everyone went nuts over the first "Streets of Rage"... sure, it was a lot of fun, but its lackluster graphics didn't hold a 5-watt light bulb to "Final Fight"'s ultra-detailed backgrounds and gigantic characters. SOR2 helped close the gap between the two series visually, and was just as entertaining as the original (something you couldn't say about "Final Fight 2"...).

El Libro

by special guest
Chris Kohler!

Well, the first thing I'd like to do is apologize to basically everyone including all of you reading this issue of "The Gameroom Blitz", since my amazing talent for forgetting things caused me to completely forget to write this article which I promised Jess a while ago, which pretty much renders me as much of a fuckhead as, say, Nick Rox (see my letter for details). Speaking of which, to think I ribbed Jess for being late with the issue and then MAKING the issue late with my profound lack of intelligence!

The second thing I'd like to do is introduce this article, which, in a nutshell, is a follow-up to Jess' article in "The Gameroom Blitz" #1. It's a review section of sorts for classic video game books, and seeing as I buy every one I see, I figured, "What the hell, I may as well expand on it!" So, to use a phrase that became commercial and trite overnight, here we gooooo! ^_^

Video Games
Joyce Worley
Dell Publishing
64 pages

This book holds two unofficial Kohler Records for being 1) The smallest video game book ever; and 2) the book you are least likely to ever find. I say this because this (very) early effort by Mrs. Arnie Katz is a Dell "Purse Book", sold at supermarket checkout lines for 69 cents in a tiny little rack alongside books with titles like "Unexplained Secrets" and "Is Your Cat Psychic?". You know the ones. Anyway, these things usually end up thrown out... it's a wonder that I actually ever got one. As you can infer, collectors' value aside, it's a pretty lousy book. It cover twelve arcade games (the big ones around 1982) and basically never gets past what one might read in the instruction booklets of these games. In fact, it covers less than what someone might find in an instruction booklet, making the book worthless from a player's standpoint. The only "pictures" are drawn representations of game screens. The only interesting things about this book is that it was

written from a female standpoint, which does show through, and the reference to the "Atari Super-Game" [which we now know as the Atari 5200. -ed.].

Be A Home Videogame Superstar
Earnest Zavisca, Ph.D., and Gary Beltowski
Childrens' Press
256 pages

This book was published in 1983, on the eve of the great video game shakeout, but certainly doesn't show it. In fact, it looks like it was written just before the whole business started to roll downhill, as the writers notes "similarities between some games" but passes it off. This book is a strategy guide to the Atari VCS and, unlike many books, actually does quite a good job of it. The actual explanations of each game's basic mechanics is concise and the coverage of the games is long and broken up into specific categories. Not only does the guide offer all the general information you'll need, but it also walks you through the first few screens of each game; quite nicely, in fact. Thus, as a strategy guide, it's excellent. As reading material, well, this book is fairly dull and never goes into anything other than straight strategy. This makes it a bad pick for amateur historians. I'd only recommend this if you still have a strong urge to play "Pac-Man" like a pro, because from the looks of it, this book can do it for you.

How To Beat The Video Games
Michael Blanchet
Fireside Publishing
112 pages

The amazingly dry and patronizing opening gives a hint as to how this book will be. The opening, entitled "The Basics", gives detailed descriptions as to how video games will not accept bent quarters and how one should not punch them. The rest of the book is pretty bad, which one can tell by a cursory examination of the pictures. Again, they're drawn screens, but are absolutely and without a doubt the worst ones I've ever seen. The book actually gives hints to the games covered, but most of them are self-evident and only cover a fraction of what better books cover. This is a book I wouldn't even buy in 1982 and not one I'd recommend you bother with.

Mastering Pac-Man
Ken Uston
Signet Publishing
130 pages

Oddly enough, this is the only book covered in this article that's devoted to a single game. Alluded to in "El Libro", this (quite) in-depth guide is primarily a pattern book, so that one can not only learn to master the arcade version of "Pac-Man", but Coleco's portable

version and the cleverly disguised clones "Pac-One" and "MazeMan". This book is very much like a Rubik's cube: it starts out deceptively simple and moves on to patterns that require memorization, plenty of quarters, and the patience of Ghandi. However, memorization of patterns seems to be the only recourse if you ever want to master Pac-Man, so this guide does its job well. The only problem is, just like a Rubik's Cube, this is not at all entertaining! The book's only value to historians and the nostalgic is that it includes the only strategies written for Pac-Man rip-offs, and the fact that it has some excellent excuses to use at an arcade, which still hold true today (except for ones like "I'm trying out a new pattern" and "This knob isn't working").

Video Games
Daniel Cohen
Pocket Books
120 pages

Despite having the same title as Joyce Worley's book, "Video Games" is absolutely nothing like it. In fact, this book has no strategies in it at all and is more of a general knowledge/history guide, probably the first of its kind. It starts by explaining to the gamer of the early 80's just what makes the games tick; old hat to us, of course. It goes on with a complete history of video games, starting with "Space War" and finishing with "Pac-Man". Short history. ^_^ Even though this book is unique, it was written for three-year olds and tells you very little. What pulls it out of the water is its quaint insights into the future of video games. I'll just run off a few choice quotes:

"Untwisting wires is one of the negative sides of playing home video games... hopefully, future technology will correct this difficulty."
"One day you probably will (play "Pac-Man" on a wall-sized television screen)!"

How To Win Video Games
The Editors of Consumer Guide
Pocket Books
96 pages

Hallelujah! Here's a book which for a change has GOOD screen representations.



They're in color, and they're actually correctly proportioned. Of note are the "Donkey Kong" arcade pics, which look exactly like the game and are so accurate that the strategies in the book can be mapped out on them. The pictures in "How To Win Video Games" go along well with the strategies in the other books I'd reviewed, but the strategies in this guide, while pretty good, fail to compare to those in other, heavier books. However, this book does quite a good job in not only introducing you to the games it covers, but provides you with the knowledge necessary to master them. "How To Win Video Games" unique qualities are the factoids about each game at the end as well as its high readability factor- it's quite interesting to just sit and read.

The Official Video Game Score Book
 Phil Gary
 PGVGC, Inc.
 Who Cares How Many Pages It Has?

For my final review (I'm just ticked that I didn't get to review Craig Kubey's book...), here's one you should be interested in. From the days when games had no battery backup and score was the most important thing in the world, some wierdo named Phil decided to publish a book with blanks for high scores. Obviously, this was a very, very stupid idea, since nobody could give a crap less [but I thought you just said "score was the most important thing in the world" back when the book was published... Nani? -confused ed.], but when you consider the amount of work that went into it (approximately two hours), Phil is a genius.

Portions of this column were edited without affecting the outcome of the reviews.



Is Jess Ragan a top fan-ed?
 Like, I totally don't know!

3-D FIGHTING GAMES CAN WORK!

HERE'S HOW...

One-on-one fighting games with polygonal graphics engines have been all the rage in the arcades and on the Playstation... in fact, the trend has cut deeply into the business of Capcom's once invincible "Street Fighter" series and threatens the very future of traditional side-scrolling beat-'em-ups. Video game magazines like "Next Generation" have been strong proponents of this relatively new genre of games, going so far as to label "Street Fighter 3" the "disappointment of the year" for the crime of being two-dimensional.

What these magazines don't seem to realize is that there are no truly 3D fighting games on the market today. "Tekken" and "Virtua Fighter" were designed to give the player the illusion of depth, but with their characters forced to fight in a straight path, these games have no true three-dimensional movement to speak of. "Battle Arena Toshinden" allowed limited 3D movement in the form of evasive rolls, but this token addition was difficult to use effectively and made the game more frustrating than fun.

Namco, Sega, and the professional video game press have tried very hard to convince us that "Virtua Fighter" and its ilk are the next step in the evolution of fighting games. However, it's my opinion that for 3D fighting games to be truly better than their side-scrolling ancestors, they must become truly 3D. Here's an example of how just such a game would work...

Being set in a completely interactive 3D environment, you'd expect "The Tides of War" (a tentative title for this yet unexistant game) to have a lot of complex controls. Surprise! Since the attacks performed depend largely on character location and the position of the joystick, it doesn't need them. The player is given buttons for all four limbs and an analog joystick with a trigger for precise movement. Characters have free range of the screen with a forced proximity similar to that of "Street Fighter 2".

The joystick allows varying degrees of movement for all characters. To pace around or close in on your enemy, simply press the stick lightly in the direction you wish to move. While doing this, your character will automatically face his opponent to ensure that any attacks you perform will connect. If things become more urgent, you can run in any direction- not just toward or away from your enemy- by holding the stick in that direction.

The trigger on the joystick controls both jumping and ducking... to duck, hold the trigger down, and to jump, simply press it. The longer the trigger is held before you let it go, the longer your jump will be. If the trigger is held down for over two seconds, the CPU assumes that you never wanted to jump at all and your character will stand once the trigger is let go. Most importantly, jumping is realistic, without the ludicrous air time of some other games <cough>.

Attacks are largely based upon intuition for the player's convenience. Press LEFT PUNCH and your character will punch with his left arm. Press the same button while pressing the joystick to your character's left and he will swing his arm in that direction. Press both PUNCH buttons at once and the fighter will hammer punch with both hands clasped together. It's that simple, and very convenient: when an area on your opponent's body is vulnerable, all you'll have to do is aim for it with the joystick and press the appropriate button.

The real beauty of "The Tides of War" is that special moves are also performed intuitively, without the button mashing and complex joystick motions that made "Tekken" such a pain. To clothesline an enemy, simply run to his left or right, then press the corresponding punch button while aiming the joystick at his neck. A more agile character could somersault by running, then pressing forward on the joystick while holding both PUNCH buttons. And for a Bruce Lee-inspired backhand, the player could leap over his opponent, land behind him, and press a PUNCH button with the joystick held backward.

I'm not saying that this wouldn't take time to get used to. I'm sure the same thing could be said about "Street Fighter 2" when it was released, but people took the time to learn to play it because it offered the most complete character control of any game released in 1991. The concepts I've presented here are, in my opinion, another step forward in the evolution of video game character control, and would greatly improve a genre that currently is three-dimensional in name only.

GAME OVER

Just when you thought it would go on forever (and that's not necessarily a bad thing, right? Right? Uh, hello...), it's time to put the kabosh on this special double issue of "The Gameroom Blitz". I'd like to thank the following people for their support: Josh Lesnick, who took the time out of his busy schedule to provide me with "Now Playing" and the title artwork that accompanied it; Alan Lanoie, who supplied me with a terrific letter for "Post Office Paranoia" and a surprisingly good Game Gear version of "Gunstar Heroes"; Chris Kohler, who also sent a great letter and a continuation of the "El Libro" saga; and everyone else who'd sent mail, contributions, games, sugary sweet confections, and anything else that wasn't written in blood and didn't explode when I opened it.

I just hope this issue holds you for a while. I'll probably be living in Arizona by the time you get this, and I'll be too preoccupied with unpacking and finding work to release another for at least a half year. Fortunately, since I'll be living closer to Josh Lesnick, there's a strong chance that the official GRB web site will be greatly improved. I've designed some great animated graphics (mostly taken from emulator screen shots) which Josh has pledged to turn into .GIFs for the site, and giving the on-line version of "The Gameroom Blitz" more branches and an improved interface will be much easier to do with Josh's direct assistance.

Off that subject, how's about that Arnie Katz? I just adored the way he wrote that review of "The Gameroom Blitz" in his pointless "Fandom Scope" column, adding just enough saccharin sweetness to his various insulting comments to make me look like a complete jerk if I contested them. Don't get me wrong; Arn-your-knees is entitled to his opinion of my fanzine (that is, if he actually bothered to read it from cover to cover...), but his statements near the end of the review were completely inexcusable. Forgive me if this sounds immodest, but I've proved to myself and countless others that I deserve to be considered what Arnie calls a "top fan-ed", with or without his approval. His failure to acknowledge my contributions to dozens of fanzines and the existence of "Project:Ignition" is nothing less than a slap in the face, which is why he will NEVER receive another issue of "The Gameroom Blitz".

In fact, I have a hard time understanding why everyone else in the hobby is so sprung on the Katz. It's obvious that the man thinks he's doing us this huge favor by reviewing fanzines on the "Inside Games" web site, but what good has it done any of us? I've never received a single reader, paying or otherwise, from both of Arnie's reviews, and I'm absolutely convinced that everyone else who's been (mis)represented in "Fandom Scope" hasn't benefitted in any way. Even Russ Ceccola- one of the editors of the site when it first began as "Escapade"- admitted that very few people bother to read "Fandom Scope". Can you blame them? It's plainly obvious that Arnie's reviews are based largely upon conjecture and guesswork, as if Katz skims through the fanzines he receives, picks out the columns with the largest headlines, and writes uninformed "opinions" about each of them. If he can't be bothered to read the newsletters he receives from front to back and write honest appraisals of them, what's the point in sending him fanzines at all?

Before I go, I thought I'd mention that Sega is going out of business. Ha! Just kidding. It's really beginning to seem that way, though. Meijer's (it's a retail store similar to Wal-Mart, but better, with groceries and higher quality products) has been selling all kinds of Sega products at fire sale prices. I was shocked to find everyone's favorite portable, the Nomad, selling for just thirty dollars more than a bare-bones Genesis system. And it doesn't stop there! Although the price of a Game Gear is still pretty high, you can find games for the system, including European exclusives like "Klax", for as little as \$10 apiece. Even the Saturn's taking it on the chin, with many of its games selling at or below the \$30 mark. There's never been a better time to take advantage of Sega's immense stupidity, so head to your nearest store and stock up! Later...

Jess

Get a load of this!

The Next Exciting Issue Of "The Gameroom Blitz" Is Just Plain Cute!

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It's all brought to you this winter
by cuddly guest editors Byron J.
Lisamen and Jypsy Shirnian!

SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: This issue may cause tooth decay, indigestion, and diabetes in some readers.



("Zina: Warrior Newsletters, con't.)

blue guy with a TV for a head, but maybe a lizard or something... 🐸

interest in and will no longer review classic video games. This unwavering look into Mike's tortured past is a fitting end to a superb fanzine. 🐸

THE LASER: ELECTRONIC DREAMS #1 MIKE PALISANO

If you happen to like "The Laser" as much as I do, you'd better snap up a copy of this special edition fast. Mike tells me that he's tired of the direction his popular 'zine is going, and plans to trash it in favor of a new publication with a stronger focus on video games. I probably would have given this idea a big thumbs up as early as a year ago, but these days, it's hard for me to imagine Palisano without creepy stories on his mind and that weird polka-dot girl by his side... Anyway. Poetic subtitle aside, this issue of "The Laser" is much like the others, with the usual blend of game reviews, surreal artwork, and disturbing prose. However, the real backbone of the issue is "I Can't Live There Anymore", where Palisano explains in unwavering detail why he's lost



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