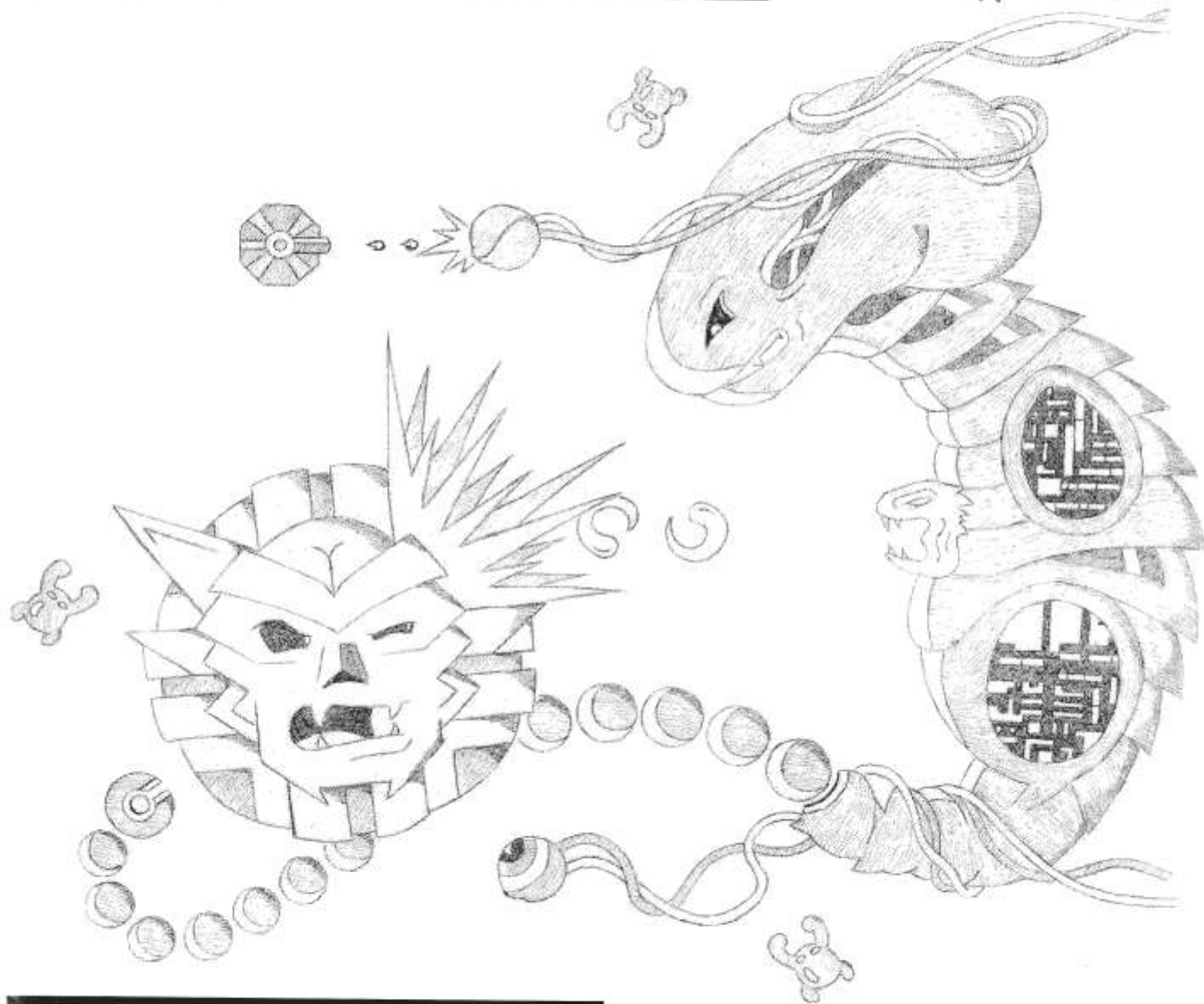


It's... It's...

THE GAMEROOM BLITZ

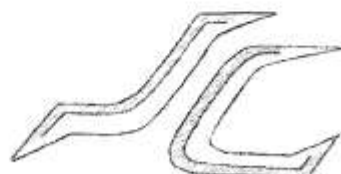
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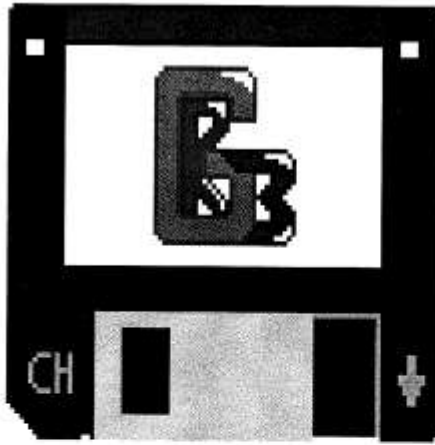


IN THIS EXCITING EDITION...

Bosses, bosses, and still more bosses!
An interview with Chris Bieniek
The triumphant return of Half-Ass
The house specialty: game.com bashing!
...all this and more!



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**ISSUE # 06
SUMMER 1999**

OPERATING SYSTEM...

MS-JES 6.0
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Chrisoft Kohl-os '99
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PKReynolds Office Suite
PatReyn.Exe
J. Lesnick's Ultimate Clip Art Gallery
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The Brian Pacula Manifesto
BrianPac.Doc
Bill Fasick Data Library
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IN THE RECYCLE BIN:

The Drudge Report
CatiLosr.Fox

ABOUT THE COVER...

The ferocious biomechanical beast Bydoxeno faces off against his archnemesis, the malevolent Sinistar, in an epic struggle that begs for its own game. It could happen!

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**Lettitor
From
The
Editor...**



Welcome one and all to the sixth edition of *The Gameroom Blitz*. Yes, it's long overdue, but anyone who read the last issue can't say they weren't warned...

Speaking of the infamous cute issue, you may have heard (from Chris Kohler, most likely) that I was disappointed with the way it turned out. Well, I'm not going to apologize for that. First of all, I didn't edit the issue. And since you obviously didn't believe that, let me just say that I looked back through GRB #5 and decided that it wasn't the disaster I'd first thought it was. It was certainly no worse than the Super Spectacular Sega Sucks Special, with its sloppy, hard to follow reviews. Wait, I was defending myself here, right?

Now that I'm up to my neck in self-deprecation, I figure I should quickly change the subject and mention that this will be the last issue of *The Gameroom Blitz*. At the very least, it's the last one you'll get this century. There are a variety of reasons for this... Ben Leatherman kindly reserved a spot on the Internet for the On-File web site, and I do have my own computer now, so I no longer have an excuse to ignore the project (unless "it took me five hours to play one game of *Satan's Hollow* on MAME" counts. Good grief, Mirko and Nicola... get the lead out and speed the damned thing up!). Moreover, the on-line companion to this fanzine hasn't been updated in eons, so I'll need plenty of time to bring it up to date; time I wouldn't have if I continued to publish the print edition of GRB. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the direction the video game industry is apparently headed has soured my enthusiasm for the hobby. Don't get me wrong; I still love video games! What I don't love are the endless barrage of gratuitously violent, appallingly sexist, and totally unimaginative releases hyped to death with vulgar commercials and print ads. A word of advice to Sony, Activision, and Eidos: If you don't have any respect for your own products, at least try to show a little to the folks who buy them.

Let's get down to business, shall we? As you probably surmised from the cover, this edition of *The Gameroom Blitz* is all about those most impressive of video game villains, bosses. Since the first player fired a quark beam past the defenses of the fireball spewing Gorfian flagship and into its glowing nuclear heart, bosses have become an inseperable part of the video game culture. They offer us focus ("where the hell IS that bastard, anyway?"), suspense ("Man, he was ugly! I wonder what the next one looks like!"), incentive ("This dude's gotta give me something cool if I can kill him..."), and a sense of accomplishment ("Finally! Geez, that was too close!"). Sure, the concept has been milked a bit since the days of *Gorf*, but this hobby just wouldn't be as exciting without a snarling, gun-laden, takes-forever-and-a-day-to-kill enemy around the next corner. This is my personal tribute to those villains who've made this hobby a little more frustrating, and a whole lot better.

Jeese Howard

GHOSTS IN THE MACHINE

PROFILE: BILL FASICK

Jess Ragan

Jess finally met one of his life's goals when he was paid for game reviews he'd contributed to the j-pop web site. He proudly announced, "I no longer feel like such a loser when I talk to other fan-ed's who've written professionally... that is, until we start talking about our social lives." Jess's favorite recording artists include *The Police*, who inspired the format of this issue's staff profiles, and "basically anyone else from the 80's."



AGE: 32

STATUS: Married (sorry, ladies!)

HOBBIES: Gaming, jet-skis, motorcycles

SYSTEMS: Super NES, Playstation

WHAT HE'S PLAYING: *Need For Speed 3*, *Gran Turismo*, *Metal Gear Solid*



Chris Kohler

Chris has become nearly as prolific as the editor, writing not only for this fanzine, but the j-pop web site, *Animerica*, and the official Tufts College conservative newsletter *The Primary Source* as well. "Source reminds me of a politically motivated *Video Zone*," Jess remarked, "right down to the biting sarcasm of the Kohler™ brand of humor." Chris is an avid *Fleetwood Mac* fan who was overjoyed by their reunion tour in 1997.

Josh Lesnick

Josh has created dozens of comics, including the popular *Asylum* (which appeared as a running series in the now defunct video game fanzine *Video Apocalypse*) and the short-lived adventure serial *Ryukun: You're The Victim*. He is currently the editor of *The Wendy Project*, a web site devoted to his favorite character from the comic series *Yumi-Chan*. Josh's taste in music varies, although he's partial to anything from Phil Collins.



Brian Pacula

Brian has been somewhat elusive after putting the knife to his fanzine *The Good, The Bad, and The 8-Bit*, appearing briefly whenever the editor requests contributions. He enjoys a career as a computer specialist, although the stress of the job has convinced him to start smoking and eating at the local *Wienerschnitzel* (both quite hazardous to your health). Brian is an unapologetic fan of the Swedish disco band *ABBA*.

Pat Reynolds

Pat recently completed an *Ehrgeiz* strategy guide for *Tips & Tricks*... how he managed to play the game for two straight days with his sanity intact is anyone's guess. He's impatiently awaiting the release of the new *Star Wars* movie, which he feels will be "killer" judging from the two minute trailers alone. Pat enjoys ska, a sort of high-speed suburban reggae punctuated with the cries of a loud brass horn.



Russ Perry, Jr.

Russ has the dubious distinction of being the only member of the staff who doubles as a recording artist. His band, the tongue-in-cheek death metal group *Dethkorpz*, recently performed live, belting out such timeless classics as *Boiling Corpses in a Pot* and *Lesbo Pussy Feast*. It's no small coincidence that the bass player for the first satirical heavy metal band, *Harry Shearer of Spinal Tap*, does voices for Russ's favorite TV show, *The Simpsons*.

Many of you may not even know who this guy is, but Bill Fasick was an important factor in the success of my last fanzine, *Project Ignition*. Bill got in on the ground floor with P.I., becoming its first real contributor and writing articles under the guise of the Game Geezer (so named because at 25, he was relatively old for a video game enthusiast). His preference for the Super NES helped balance out my almost rabid pro-Genesis bias, and even inspired a comic where the two of us (thinly disguised as superheroes) battled over the faults of both systems.

I'd lost touch with Bill about a year before the last issue of *Project Ignition* was released. Last summer, I decided to get a hold of him with the aid of several Internet resources and see what he's been up to for the last few years. Bill was kind enough to submit two articles to this issue of *The Gameroom Blitz*. I'm happy to welcome him back as both a contributor and a friend. Without him, it's a very real possibility that I would have quit fandom well before *The Gameroom Blitz* debuted in 1996.

COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN? NOT WITH INSTANT MESSENGER.

Seeing as I have a little extra space to fill, I'd like to let you know about a great piece of software Al Riccitelli, Jr. of *The Dark Side* introduced me to recently. It's called *AOL Instant Messenger*, and it's perfect for brief conversations with other fan-ed's... the kind that are just too cumbersome for standard E-mailing but really aren't worth the expense and hassle of a phone call. The ad bar at the top of the main menu is a little annoying, but that's very easily ignored when you consider how useful this program can really be. If you don't have *AOL Instant Messenger*, you can download and register it from America On-Line's web site at www.aol.com. If you've already established an AIM account, give me a buzz sometime! My handle is mneko13.

THE MANY LIVES OF ... CAPTAIN COMMANDO

Captain Commando has been the unofficial mascot and spokesperson of Capcom for over a decade now... in fact, his name is a derivation of the company that created him (Cap-Com, get it?). Over the years, the Cap'n has changed dramatically, as you can see from these pictures.



The Captain, looking very much like an intergalactic pimp



Was this version of the Captain discharged from the Atari Force?



The Cap-Com we know today, from *Marvel vs. Capcom*

Destroy All Monsters!

* Er, better make that bosses...

Every man has an enemy, but not every enemy is respected as a skilled and honorable warrior. I asked several fanzine editors to list three of the video game bosses that stood above the rest as worthy foes, and here's who they came up with.

Jess Ragan

Editor of this very fanzine!

Naturally, I get first crack at this. And my choices are...

Geese Howard, *Fatal Fury* (Neo-Geo)

This cruel industrialist is arguably the best character in SNK's extensive South Town series (a line of games which includes not only *Fatal Fury* but *The Art of Fighting* and *The King of Fighters* as well). Geese's abilities are nothing special, but what makes him much more threatening than other video game villains is his startling level of character development. For instance, Geese is labelled as the murderer of the father of *Fatal Fury*'s title characters, but it's later revealed in *The Art of Fighting* that he forced Takuma Sakazaki (the father of that game's central character) to do the job for him. This instantly thrusts Geese into the center of the South Town universe, making each fighter's relationship to him important in its own unique way.

Seven Force, *Gunstar Heroes* (Genesis)

There were literally dozens of bosses in this intense shooter, and from the seemingly harmless Minion Soldier to the Treesweet™ orange-filled Pit to the relentless Core Defense System, all were fun and inventive in their own right. But nothing can compare to the towering mechanical menace that is Seven Force. Piloted by the traitorous Gunstar Green, Seven Force has the ability to transform into a variety of deadly weapons, including a panther, a sea urchin (trust me, it's nastier than it sounds), and an enormous pistol which actually changes clips as it runs out of ammo. Best of all, Treasure perfected the sprite linkage technique first explored in *Centipede*, making the mighty mech's animation incredibly smooth (especially for its size). The final battle with Golden Silver seemed almost anticlimactic after two encounters with this behemoth.

Gorfian Flagship, *Gorf* (arcade, VIC-20)

Admittedly, this is a bit of a stretch as a choice, since *Gorf*'s massive space cruiser can



The fireball spewing Gorfian Flagship is still a formidable challenge

be destroyed with one shot. However, hitting the flagship's weak spot (a pixel-wide vent leading to an ominously glowing nuclear reactor) with one blast is a mighty tall order, especially when said ship is pelting you with an endless barrage of galactic brimstone. Chipping away at the hull makes the job easier, but the resulting rain of scrap metal further impedes your movement, making the battle even more intense. In short, this is arguably the most fun and inventive boss fight in the history of the hobby, which is saying a lot when you also consider that it's the very first.

BRIAN PACULA

Former editor, *The Good, The Bad, and the 8-Bit*

Well, let's see...

In descending order of coolness...

The Changeling, *Wizards & Warriors* (NES)

Wizards & Warriors had endless, come-back-to-life-where-you-died continues, which is probably the biggest combined blessing and curse in video games that I can think of offhand, in that it constantly denies the player an excuse to give in to frustration and do something else for a while. I'm not even going to TRY to speculate on how much time I spent, in one single afternoon, trying to beat that forsaken Changeling from W&W. It starts as a tiny, bone-throwing skeleton that grows and grows as you beat on it (yeah, yeah, go ahead and giggle at that sentence). It was nastier than the last boss of W&W, took an interminable amount of damage, and BOY was I relieved beyond belief when I finally killed the damned thing. The Changeling has my undying respect as the hardest boss fight I've ever had to deal with in a video game, the most TIME I've ever spent in one stretch on any single boss, and **THE MOST ANNOYING SON OF A BITCH I EVER WASTED MY PRECIOUS**

PREADOLESCENT TIME, EFFORT, AND SANITY TRYING TO KILL. Rock on, Changeling. Take your brownish-red bone and dig my grave.

ExDeath, *Final Fantasy V* (Super Famicom)

Without question, THE coolest, baddest, bitchiest boss Square has come up with. It had two forms (doesn't EVERY RPG boss?), both of which were innovative and artistic (first form: a man-faced worm made of twisting vines; second form: a strange amalgamate of semihuman body parts), and was MUCH more impressive than Chaos (zzz...), Zeromus (which end is up? What IS that thing supposed to be, anyway?), Kefka (wuss), Sephiroth (wuss), or any of the Japanese *Final Fantasy* bosses. And it put up a great fight, too. Hard, but not impossible, unpredictable, long-lived, exciting... the works. If *Final Fantasy V* had been released in America, ExDeath would have set a new standard in final RPG bosses. For certain.

Ridley and Kraid, *Metroid* (NES)

I can not, in good conscience, choose between the two, nor can I split them up. They share this honor. *Metroid* was a great mood game, was brilliantly original at the time, and had two of the most kick-ass bosses ever. When I was ten, I wanted to BE Ridley or Kraid. Hey, when a game only HAS two bosses (let's face it, Mother Brain just sorta sits around and lets you shoot her), they'd better be damned good.

PAT REYNOLDS

Editor, *Fantazine*

Contributor, *Tips & Tricks Magazine*

Hmm... this could take some thought...

Bloody Malth, *Ninja Gaiden* (NES)

This was the guy who would put a serious hurt on you unless you had the cajones to get right in his face and mercilessly hack him to death with your sword. Sure, once you knew this trick, he was a snap to defeat, but he gave birth to a new gaming phrase my friend Rich Plummer and I use to this day... if a boss or enemy can be defeated in this manner of mindless beating, you're "doing the Bloody Malth".

Sagat, *Street Fighter* series (various)

I defy anyone to tell me that any other *Street Fighter* boss is as cool as Sagat. This guy took a dragon punch to the chest and lived to fight on. He laughs mercilessly when he wins. And that Tiger Uppercut is just so



Suzanne Somers beware: Sagat is the original (Muey) Thai Master

damned cool. Sagat is the man.

Sephiroth, *Final Fantasy VII* (Playstation)

Probably the single coolest bad guy in the history of video games, Sephiroth is the main villain in this game, and you must fight him in many different forms throughout this adventure. Near the end he "pulls a Tetsuo" and mutates into a couple crazy monsters, but for the final encounter, he reverts back to his normal self and takes the beating of his life at Cloud's hands. Add to that the fact that he kills off one of the main party members halfway through the game and there's nothing you can do about it, and that his final monster form has its own extremely cool theme song, and you've got a truly classic RPG boss character.

Chris Kohler

Editor, *Video Zone*

Okie dokie... this is going to be tough, but I'll rack my brain...

Brain: Ow.

Birdo, *Super Mario Bros 2*. (NES)

He's a transvestite dinosaur who spits eggs, which you need to throw back at him. He can even help you out from time to time. Need I say more?

Bowser Koopa, *Super Mario Bros.* (various)

The best thing about Bowser is that even though you KNOW he's at the end of every *Super Mario Bros.* game, you never know what he's going to do. In the first game, he threw fireballs, hammers, and jumped around on a bridge suspended over molten lava. In *Super Mario Bros. 3*, he tried to leap on you but wound up crashing through the floor! In *Super Mario World*, he rode in the Clown Copter. In the sequel, he smashed his way toward you in Mode 7 glory. And in *Super Mario 64*, he attacked in full 3D. It's always a surprise to see

how he's going to attack next.

Kefka, *Final Fantasy VI* (Super Famicom)

After defeating his gigantic, three-screen-high statue, and just when you think it's finally over, Kefka descends, looking nothing like his previous goofy self and everything like an evil Renaissance archangel. He even talks to you as you battle!

Josh Lesnick

Former editor, *Video Apocalypse*
AnePRO website proprietor

Robo-Z, *Bust A Move: Dance & Rhythm Action* (Playstation)

Here we have an entry from one of the most recent games, *Bust A Move* [aka *Bust A Groove* in the US... -ed.]. As cars swerve and blow up around him, the boss character continues to pull off his techno beat dance moves. Woulda thought a giant robot could be so funky? Yeah, baybe!

Mother Brain, *Super Metroid* (Super NES)

Yeah, I risked picking something someone else picked here, but I had to do it... not just for the boss itself, but the great sequence that takes place when fighting it. The poor mutant Metroid sacrifices its life to save its mommy (sniffle). Samus then gets a kick-ass beam, and great alien shrieks are heard when Samus nails the bitch in the face with it.

Spaceman the 3M, *Keioh Yuugekitai* (Saturn)

In my opinion, when video games try to be funny, they rarely succeed, and to make me laugh out loud... that's almost unheard of. But I did just that several times when playing *Keioh*. The alien spaceship Rami-chan fights uses a crane to pick up cows, engulfs them, and fires meat at her. After Rami does enough damage, the spaceship reveals its true form... and a sexy pair of gams!



From description at right: Even the glue factory wouldn't take Motaro

Who's The Boss?

Definitely not these guys.

That... thing. *Faxanadu* (NES)

What the fuck? Our hero goes through all the trouble to find the **DRAGON** sword, and the last boss isn't even a dragon! It's just a lame-o demon head perched on two legs! Gimme a break!

Dark Force, *Phantasy Star II* (Genesis)

Nothing can foul up an RPG like a cheesy boss which forces you to spend 753 hours wandering around gaining experience so you can get through one round of battle without getting killed. Whee... fun. Defeat him and the "Mother Brain" and you're treated to the most unsettling ending in RPG history.

The Shadow Guy, *Double Dragon II* (arcade)

You've beaten Willy to death... your revenge for Marien's pointless demise is complete. It's an appropriate time for the game to end, but no, good 'ol Technos thought it would be cute to tack a "true" boss onto the end of the level: an evil clone of Billy, whose existence has no explanation whatsoever. He has a COMPLETELY UNAVOIDABLE move which kills you in three hits, which he does every ten seconds. I sacrificed more lives fighting this fuck than I used getting to him!

The Shadow, *Zelda II* (NES)

Everybody musta been real tired and in a hurry to go home on the day they came up with THIS guy.

Ghaleon, from *Lunar* (Sega CD)

After SO much buildup and anticipation, you'd think he'd try to put up a halfway decent fight.

Dr. Robotnik, from the *Sonic* series (various)

Never very hard to beat, never very ominous or impressive, never really developed as a character...

Motaro, *Mortal Kombat 3* (various)

Here's proof positive that, for a game to have artificial intelligence, its programmers must possess a little of the genuine article. That jackass of a centaur Motaro is COMPLETELY impervious to projectiles and does out grotesque amounts of damage with every cheap hit, reducing battles with him to futile jump kick fests. That's entertainment?

Compiled by Josh Lesnick, Brian Pacula, & Jess Ragan

Track Record

What's The Big Idea!?

Ever since the debut of Nirvana's *Nevermind* album in 1991, recording artists have been hiding everything from computer games to interactive museums on their albums to keep their most loyal fans surprised (or just mess with their minds). With their own reputation for easter eggs, it was only natural that this trend would spread to the world of video games. Here's a few of the treats buried deep within the reflective plastic of the Saturn's most memorable CDs.

Midway's Arcade's Greatest Hits: The Williams & Atari Collections **Track 3**

Included on the first disc for no logical reason is a really long, really bizarre rave tune with audio from what sounds like an old motorcycle racing game (Williams' *Star Rider*, perhaps?). Nobody was credited for this track in either the instruction manual or the game itself, leading me to believe that it was the product of tomfoolery at the Digital Eclipse offices. One more curious note: the song continues on Midway's first Atari collection, but the first two minutes are full of a harsh, static noise, apparently intended to psych people out of playing the track on a standard CD player. What is the mystery behind this phantom music? Only Dan Filner knows for sure.

Super Puzzle Fighter 2 Turbo **Track 2**

If the game wasn't weird enough for you, there's actually a song performed by Sakura Kasugano which you can access by beating her in the (insanely frustrating) Street Puzzle mode. To ensure that players wouldn't cheat and just listen to it on their stereos, Capcom put the instrumental portion of the melody on the CD and had the Saturn itself belt out the lyrics. Impressive? Sure. Sadistic? You'd better believe it!

Samurai Shodown 3: Blades of Blood **Tracks 32-36**

The ambient Japanese soundtrack is the ONLY thing that makes this disgrace to the Samurai Shodown series worth a passing glance. Sensing this, SNK threw on a few extra tracks not accessible from the game- a sugary sweet pop melody vaguely similar to the one Sakura sings in Puzzle Fighter, and a series of conversations between Nakoruru and her sister about *Samurai Shodown RPG*. These, and the game's masterfully composed feudal dirges, make the CD worth a few spins in a Discman... just keep it the hell away from your Saturn!

Pocket Fighter **File POCKET.SCR**

Here's a trick that's guaranteed to liven up your desktop long after the game itself gets stale (believe me, that won't take long). Just pop the CD into your computer- no, that wasn't a typo- then find the file named POCKET and transfer it to the directory C:\WINDOWS\SYSTEM. Next, enter the Control Panel, click on the Display icon, and then click the Screen Saver tab to switch to its menu screen. Choose the Pocket screen saver out of the ones listed in the scroll box, and voila! It's just the thing to inspire fan-eds exhausted from editing dozens of articles.

Street Fighter: The Movie **Music Video (!)**

It's a pity so few people had the chance to see this... It makes good use of the Saturn's limited full-motion video capabilities, and is the highlight of an otherwise mediocre offering by Acclaim (aren't they all?). Simply beat the game in the Movie Battle Mode... it won't be easy, or fun, for that matter, but it's worth the trouble. After a brief ending, you'll be treated to the soulful sounds of Japanese pop artist Ryo Aska. It should be noted that this is also the only time the game's stars were allowed to keep even a shred of their dignity... Mulan's Ming Na Wen looks particularly fetching firing a few sultry stares at the camera (gee, what would Disney say?). After the song comes to a close, check the Back-Up menu and you'll find a new option, Video Clip. Now, you have instant access to the video without having to endure a minute of the game!

If you're crazy enough about video games to spend most of your free time writing about them, it's only natural that you'd come up with a few game concepts of your own. I myself have been designing games- on paper, at least- for over fifteen years! Usually they're just derivatives of whatever I'm enjoying at the moment... for instance, I became so obsessed with *Super Mario Bros.* when I'd first bought my NES that I spent most of my time in grade school drawing screenshots of blatantly obvious rip-offs. One of them, *Sherm Blerm*, actually did become a reality on my humble VIC-20, but the game was such a flickery, simplistic mess that it was barely recognizable as a tribute to Marlo's first side-scrolling adventure. Before this, I paid homage to the original *Mario Bros.* with another obvious clone, marking the debut of the demented sanitation worker Cory Fartsmeller (and you thought the characters in this fanzine were bizarre!).

On rare occasions, I've come up with great video game ideas that haven't been tried before, or ones that combine elements from two different genres to create an entirely new gameplay experience. An example of the latter is *Scrambled Eggs*, a virtual life simulation which demands quick thinking and reflexes from the player. It's sort of a high-speed hybrid of the Tomagotchi fad and intense shooters like Williams' *Robotron:2084*. Most of the artwork for the game is finished, but sadly, I never got around to working it into a program.

Sometimes, I'll think of inventive new twists to existing games, like *Addends*. *Addends* is a fast action puzzle game similar to *Tetris*, except you must put trios of numbers together as sums to clear them from the playfield (ie putting 224 together in a horizontal, vertical, or diagonal line erases all three numbers).

For those interested in a less cerebral challenge, I have low-brow concepts like *Rock 'n Fish*. I came up with this one after an exhilarating boat ride with my cousin... It's an arcade-style fishing simulation, with the added benefit of outrageous, *Road Rash*-style races to the best spots on the lake. If someone threatens to leave you in their wake, you can simply knock them off their boats with a well-timed shotgun blast or beer can toss.

Fans of the, ahem, sport of wrestling would love *Unlimited Access Professional Wrestling*, a game which gives both you and your opponent full run of the wrestling arena. Not satisfied with fighting in the ring? Toss your opponent into the audience, then drag the poor sap out into the parking lot and send him headfirst into a lamppost! Unlimited access means unlimited punishment!

If you've ever had a great video game idea, share it with the rest of fandom! I'm sure we'd all love to hear about it.

Special thanks go to the folks at Game Sages and Tips & Tricks for their assistance



The cast of *Pocket Fighter*, as seen in the game's hidden screen saver

Arcade Squeezins

DUAL ATTACK

Arcade observations by Jess Ragan & a trip to GameWorks™ by Bill Fasick

So there I was, a grown man standing just feet away from a fat foam rubber king, some idiot in a ratty fox costume, and a young woman so perky she'd turn Katie Couric into an axe-wielding lunatic. Apparently the local Fox affiliate had gone on location to announce that some brats in Tucson had won free golf passes, or something... I really didn't care, because the station's cameramen were blocking my access to the only Neo-Geo machines in the Golf 'n Stuff arcade. I muttered every obscenity I could imagine under my breath and forced myself to play a *Marvel vs. Capcom* machine that had seen better days... I usually love the game, but nothing sucks the fun right out of it than a pair of faulty joysticks.

It was at that time that I'd decided to move on to greener pastures and a better arcade, leading me to a hangout at the University of Arizona. Sam's Place in Tucson was profiled in *Tips & Tricks* about a year ago, and I can't thank them enough for the recommendation... this arcade is the exact opposite of Golf 'n Stuff, with clean facilities, an extensive collection of well-maintained games, and older, more experienced players who put up a real challenge in competitive titles like *Bust-A-Move* and the aforementioned *Marvel vs. Capcom*. There was no trace of the legendary one-handed terror of Tucson, but that small disappointment aside, I must say that I was very pleased with Sam's Place. Check it out the next time you're in Southern Arizona.

Oh, yes... I can't forget about the games themselves. I haven't been doing too much arcade hopping since the last issue of GRB was published, but I did manage to find some memorable (although not always for the best reasons) games. High on that list is *Jojo's Venture*, a CPS3 fighting game which marks the first joint project between Capcom and animation studio Shueisha since 1994's *Saturday Night Slammasters*. Every fighting game needs a gimmick to establish its own identity, and Jojo's is a doozy... each character is partnered with a ghostly familiar called a stand. The player can either fight alone or summon the stand to increase his overall offensive power... but there's a catch. Your fighter's stand has its own life meter and can be damaged or even snuffed out briefly, leaving you unprotected until it can recover. This results in some pretty insane battles, with the characters beating the stuffing out of anyone within arm's length. Couple this with inventive new chase scenes and nutty characters ranging from a tiny, flatulent dog to a scanty clad temptress who smashes her opponents with Cadillacs,

and you've got a game you won't believe even after you play it!

Sadly, I wasn't as enthused about the latest Street Fighter games. *Street Fighter Alpha 3* is, in my estimation, a step down from the previous Alpha release in almost every respect. The new characters are nothing special (especially Cody from *Final Fight*, who's now clad in handcuffs and a Keystone Cops-era prison uniform. Huh...?), and the overall presentation was a real turn-off to me, with cheesy tickertape messages and the single most irritating announcer in a video game since Namco's *Ridge Racer* first hit store shelves. I don't even like to think about *Street Fighter EX 2*... any future Arika had as a leading game developer was blown to bits once they delivered this obviously rushed sequel to Capcom's home offices.

Moving on to the world of gun games, we have *House of The Dead*, *CarnEvil*, and *Zero Point*. I must admit that it took me a while to understand *House of the Dead's* appeal... I wasn't that into the game even when I played it with Fanarchy editor Ben Leatherman (who declared, "You SUCK!" after I'd missed one too many killer

frogs). However, *Pagoda no Shinjin* grew on me after I'd spent a little time blasting zombies at Golf 'n Stuff. The irony is, I still like Sega's other shooter *The Lost World* more, even though I hate the *Jurassic Park* films with a passion. Perhaps the tension Steven Spielberg tried to create in those movies is better realized in a video game...

Of course, whenever a company releases a brilliant game like *House*, you can always expect Midway to leech from its success with a shameless clone, filled to the brim with gratuitous violence. Admittedly, *CarnEvil* is solidly designed, and its creepy amusement park theme is pretty clever, but sensitive players should approach it with caution... the game's constant gory deaths combined with the frightening drops of an ultra-realistic roller coaster ride will make them sick faster than a trip inside a Tilt-A-Whirl with a belly full of nachos.

Topping it all off is the GameVision release *Zero Point*, a fun shooting gallery which bears a striking resemblance to Namco's *Point Blank*. You can't say they didn't have it coming- after all, Namco has been cribbing ideas from Sega for years- but the differences between *Zero Point* and its inspiration are so slight that a lawsuit has to be just around the corner. Play this one while you can, folks... it's not going to be around for much longer!

Alas, so many games, so little space... as usual, I'll finish this article on another page, preferably near the back of the issue. Just take a right at the Bieniek interview... you can't miss it! ▶

My Trip To GameWorks™ or... FLEECING PRIVATE FASICK

Well, I finally got to see what all the buzz was about concerning those newfangled theme arcades. I think the theme at GameWorks is this: "There's a sucker born every minute."

Upon walking into the arcade, I noticed a sign on one of the vending machines which read "No Refunds For Unused Credit" (you buy a debit card at the door and swipe it through a reader built into the games instead of using tokens). This made me want to buy as little credit as possible, although the games were expensive, ranging in cost from fifty cents for *Pac-Man* to five dollars for costly GameWorks exclusives.

The GameWorks building is designed like a warehouse, complete with scaffolding and catwalks. There's a cafe' and lounge on the second floor, and its prices are just as ridiculous as those for the games, with three dollar beers and seven dollar burger plates. The restrooms are designed with a chrome-plated steel so shiny you'll wonder whether you're in an arcade or a gay bar!

GameWorks' main attraction is a game similar to *Area 51*... you sit in a chair facing a giant screen, and as you progress from level to level, your chair moves vertically. This makes just watching the game a lot of fun. Most of the other games are of the ride-on variety, like *Alpine Racer*, *Wave Shark*, and *Prop Cycle*. The one that interested me most had a Harley that you rode through Los Angeles a'la the Terminator.

All in all, though, GameWorks was a very disappointing experience, kind of like trying to get a decent meal in an airport. Sure, you'll eventually get fed, but the prices, service, and atmosphere all really stink.



Deep Sixed Nine?

Long time readers of The Gameroom Blitz will remember that I'd reviewed the Genesis adaptation of the television series *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* nearly three years ago. They'll also recall that I felt the game was an insult to both Genesis owners (who were already up to their ankles in rushed crapola in 1996) and fans of the entertaining science-fiction show. I took my complaints directly to Maurice Molyneaux, lead designer of the *Deep Space Nine: Crossroads of Time* games, and was more than a little surprised by his response...

It's impossible to address your comment on DS9 without getting into some significant detail. Excuse how lengthy this is going to be, but it should give you an idea of why the game ended up as it did.

The show was not even on the air when the game design had to be started (Dec. 1992), and by the time development started only six episodes had been shown. There was little to base it on. All I had when I started was the writer's guide, six scripts, and a few photographs. I had to personally call the DS9 art dept. and beg Rick Sternbach for set plans and other reference materials for the artists to work from, even after the show hit the airwaves, as there wasn't enough reference material on video alone.

The game was *Prince of Persia*-like because the game was made by the developer of *Ecco the Dolphin*, and a decision was made to re-use its engine. This engine is a high-speed omni-directional scroller, and this dictated the kind of game it would be.

I actually quit the project for 11 months because the product manager and I could not agree on how the development should proceed, so I walked. I only returned when the project was faltering and the new VP at Playmates personally asked me to come back and save the thing.

When I came back on the project it was already 20% too big to fit in the final cart, and unfinished. Unfortunately, so much work had been done that it was impossible to start over. I was forced to re-sequence the existing material and try to tie it together with only minor changes possible. The first thing I had to

do was jettison several sub-games that had been written. One of these, for instance, was a vaguely *Missile Command*-like system wherein you had to stop infiltrating Borg programs from reaching data in a computer (see figure 1).

You'd have to talk to the programmers about how compressed or uncompressed the game is, but the fact of the matter is that the game got severely truncated because of ROM limitations (it was etched in stone that this was to be an 8 megabit cart). For example, originally, you were to be playing every major character, but because there wasn't enough space, the female character run cycles wouldn't fit, and the programmers would not let go of the useless wormhole sequence (much as I begged), so we had to lose the playable female characters (all of the male characters use the same bodies, with clever color substitution to make them look like they're different), and we also lost a major movement type for the remaining characters: the ability to crawl (figure 2- note the warp core to the right, part of fully half of the Saratoga that was junked for space reasons), and the ability to ride turbo-lifts (figure 3).

The first level of the game was supposed to be the starship Saratoga, which ultimately ended up being a near penultimate level. The play mechanics were supposed to start there and get more complex as you got into the game. However, the Saratoga that survives in the final game is only 40% of what it was supposed to be, so it's not even indicative of what the game would have been.

Then there's Paramount. Their licensing dept. changed their minds so often that game details had to be constantly revised. First, they insisted that the game had to start on the station, not on the Saratoga, which forced the game structure to be changed radically. Second, at the last minute we were told we

could not use the Borg, and that had to be fought, as the level was finished. Additionally, they actually tried to UNAPPROVE the game script a month AFTER they signed off on it.

This above is not an isolated horror story, but actually pretty typical of game development. Believe me, no one is more disappointed by how the DS9 cart came out than I am, but circumstances being what they were, it's actually amazing that it was even as playable as it was.

--Maurice

And that, boys and girls, is precisely why Paramount needs to be put out of its, and my, misery... I mean, really, couldn't the company just be satisfied running its television network into the ground without sticking its talentless fingers into everyone else's pie?

Oh well. As nice as the extra rounds and mini-games would have been, I'm not sure if I would have enjoyed *Crossroads of Time* even if it hadn't been bastardized... I think Alan Lanoie (what the heck happened to him, anyway?) was right when he'd observed that the *Star Trek* concept just doesn't translate well to the video game medium. I keep thinking that *Deep Space Nine* may have been fun as (and I know this is going to sound ridiculous) a fighting game similar to *Marvel Super Heroes*, but I just don't see it happening. The characters are certainly unique enough to make it work, and the outlandish scenerio could easily be explained by having the game take place inside one of Quark's holosuites, but Capcom and *Star Trek* just don't seem like two phrases I'd expect to see together in the same sentence...

In any event, Maurice, thanks for the eye-opening look inside the game design process. I never realized that there were so many stumbling blocks to creating a worthwhile release... I was under the impression that programmers and designers were given a little more autonomy, but I guess that's only the case if you're an industry leader who's not being goaded into stamping out some lame side-scrolling platformer or whatever with a popular movie or television license. With that in mind, perhaps I should show a little more sympathy to the programmers who are forced to create these games rather than calling for their heads on a silver platter... I'm sure *Rugrats* was ten times more excruciating to design than it is to play (and just playing it is bad enough...).

At right: Pictures from an early version of DS9. Sadly, these scenes were cut from the final release.

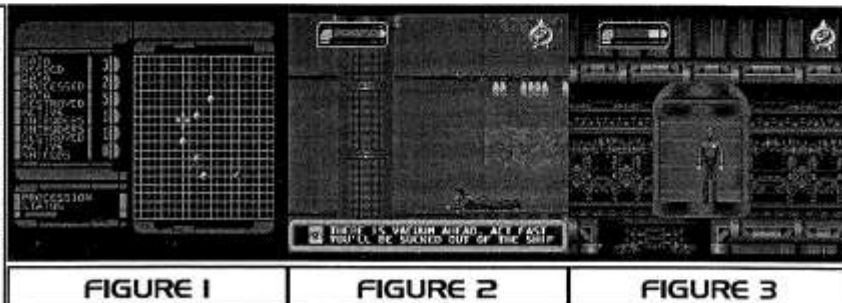


FIGURE 1

FIGURE 2

FIGURE 3

Oh yeah, you'll find \$2 enclosed for the next GRB. Dammit.

Papa Boehmer...

Scott Boehmer

PART TWO: THE SECOND AND THIRD PAGES

Yo Jess,

Okay. So I know you complained about people who take too long to write to you in your last issue. Well, I guess this formally puts me on your shitlist (so to speak). For what it's worth, I've taken FAR longer to respond to people on other occasions. Not that this should make my apology mean anything more to you, but I just thought I'd offer that in my defense.

Anyhow, on to GRB #5. I dug it. It was good. Squeezins Jet and Post Office Paranoia! stood out as personal faves. Don't ask me why (actually, I usually like letter columns, especially when there's some names I actually recognize in them. This actually says quite a bit about the state of fandom today, but hey...). Oh yeah, Mad Gears didn't suck, either [you've really gotta work on your compliments there, Scott... -ed.]. I've always been a sucker for portables, as you should know, and this helped satiate my appetite. On a side note, some company is actually bringing out a device to play Lynx games on a TV! A little late, yes, but this and the HEAVY indie programming for the system stand out as true testaments to it.

Themewise GRB was OK, tho I admit not being too into cuteness. The reviews were particularly fun, but the secondary character reviews seemed a tad unnecessary. Let's face it, any characters you write for are bound to have opinions fairly similar to your own. Still, the bird's (Polly? Crackers?) [Molotov, actually... -ed.] review of *Superman* made it all worthwhile...

Bad American Cartoons was also enjoyable, even if I have only seen a few of the shows you reviewed. And no review of *Beast Wars*?!? Shame... In spite of this oversight, the feature was a good idea (point to Mr. Lesnick) and served the 'zine well.

Finally, I feel obliged to end this excellent, thought-provoking letter (save it for the day I become a famous writer or something) with a follow-up to the last correspondence I graced you with. I actually have a computer now [so do I! Ain't life grand? -ed.]. Not that I bought one, mind you... it's just that Billy [Scott's brother, formerly The Dangerous Billy Masters of *Random Access* fame -ed.] had bought it about a year and a half ago and then got an even newer computer for signing on at his new job as a software tester. So, being the generous type that he is, Billy gave me his old 'puter (d'ya recognize the sad Mindstorm reference? Do ya?). Now, I know I said last time that getting a computer could prompt me to revive *Random Access*, but now I must hedge. Too much work, laziness, and more excuses will most likely keep any future issues of RA from being created. It could happen, but...

Hoo, boy... and you thought you were late with your response! Man, you're really going to want to kill me for waiting so long to finish this issue... and I'm sure you're not the only one!

I gotta admit, failing to include *Beast Wars* in the last issue was a bit of an oversight on my part. I think I had some rationale for leaving it off the list, but I'm not sure just what it was; maybe I thought it had been cancelled, or that it didn't really fit with the theme because it isn't a cartoon in the most traditional sense of the word. Nevertheless, here's a quick synopsis of the show for your benefit: terrific computer rendering, corny but sometimes amusing dialogue, lame voice-overs. Better than the old Transformers TV series, but not as cool as Mainframe's other show *Reboot*.

Now that you mention it, I am thinking about getting back into the Lynx groove. I used to own the system, but sold it out of frustration when I couldn't find any games for it. Now that I'm currently empty-handed (or more accurately, empty-Handy), great Lynx exclusives like *Blue Lightning* and *STUN Runner* have been popping up all over the place at Bookman's! Arrgh!!! I'd like to have another Lynx just to play those two games, but I have no interest in buying one of the older Stayfree models, and the new ones are damned near impossible to find. I'll keep trying, though... anything's got to be better than a GameBoy (the official handheld of both the Jetsons AND the Flintstones!).

The Cynic's Guide To Fanzine Dissection

OK, I've read the issue and will respond to it... .. (wait for it)... ..now.

PROLOGUE: THE COVER

I loved the cover, although I was wondering why William Gaines was looking down upon fandom until I saw the who's who in the back. Watching all the little JessCreated™ fan-ed caricatures crawling around is something I've always gotten a kick out of...

PART ONE: THE FIRST PAGE

Having eaten there about five times in the last month, I've got to back you up on that Der Wienerschnitzel thing, it's disgusting. Course, I'll probably eat there again before long, since there's really no other places to quickly and cheaply satisfy a craving for sickly grade D meat in tube form. Their fries always taste like someone had been sitting on them for

a while before they were served.

Why is Byron the only creature wearing underwear?
I want to thank you for making a cute themed issue without once using the word "kawaii", which would have made me violently ill. Thank you!

PART THREE NOT AVAILABLE

PART FOUR: THE FIFTH PAGE (LETTERS)

Jiminy Christmas, names I recognize in the letters page! And here I had thought all my contemporary fan-ed's were slaughtered like hogs in the purges that brought about the third generation of fanzines! Boy, is my face red.

PART FIVE: THE...uh...

Bad American Cartoons? That's redundant. American Cartoons would be tidier... or maybe just Bad Cartoons... or hell, cartoons altogether pretty much blow. And anime'. And a hefty portion of live-action shows too.

PART SIX: PICK UP STICKS

Nobody sends me fanzines anymore. Probably because I dropped off the face of the earth and everything, but that's hardly an excuse. When you're a fan-ed, you're a fan-ed for life! I want fresh fanzines delivered to my grave, you hear me? To my graaaaaave!!!

INTERMISSION

(PA plays selections from Paula Cole, *Matchbox 20*, and *Third Eye Blind*)
(Bodies are squeezed and skulls are crushed like ripe melons as everyone rushes the exit)
(Exit of what, exactly?)
(Never you mind)

PART SEVEN: DIAL F FOR FANZINE

I want to play Bastards! My picks are Dr. Laura Schlessinger, James van Praagh, and Leeza Gibbons.

PART NINE: THERE IS NO PART EIGHT

I want to see more *Fan-Ed Fracas* graphics! Now now now!!! It looks bitchin' and you've captured my essence very well.

PART TEN: THE LAST PAGE

404 Not Found

So, when's the next issue?

First, that's a diaper. Byron's tried wearing underwear before, but the results were pretty unpleasant...

Off that subject (please!)... I guess we both dodged a bullet on the kawaii thing. Josh Lesnick actually *did* send a review of *Pocket Fighter* with the offending word inside, but I just didn't have room for it in the last issue (the review, not the word "kawaii", although either could apply). Just so you know, I'm not especially fond of that adjective, either... being an anime fan, Josh used to use it constantly, and it really bugged the hell out of me because I had no idea what "kawaii" meant. To his credit, at least Josh stopped using the term (for the most part) before it became trendy.

The rest of your letter speaks for itself, but I just can't pass up an opportunity to trash Weinerschnitzel (yes, Eric, again. Live with it. :). There's one in Tucson which just added a sister franchise to the building called (here's a clever name for you) The Hamburger Stand. One day, and I swear this is absolutely true, there was a banner flying from the restaurant that read, "Tuesdays: Hamburgers For 19¢." It sounds like a hell of a deal, but once you bite into that dry hockey puck they graciously call a meat patty, served on a crushed bun with just a droplet of mustard and catsup, you'll realize that THEY'RE the ones making out like bandits.

As If You Needed More Proof Of How Late This Issue Really Is...

Jess:

Hey there. Well, this should be the... uh... third e-mail in your box from me today, so I'll keep it long. Maybe a paragraph about each page of GRB #5.

Overall, I thought the issue was fine. I wouldn't call it your best yet, since I particularly liked the Super Spectacular Sega Sucks Special, but there's no reason to think it's just as good, if not better, than all your other issues. And of course, GRB beats the hell out of most every other fanzine anyway. Speaking of which, GRB is my favorite 'zine... why wouldn't it be? The amount of time and effort you put into each facet of *The Gameroom Blitz* is always apparent, from the well thought-out articles to the always pun and arcane reference-filled reviews to the appealing layout.

Okay, on to the latest ish. Nice cover! But I have to ask... whatever made you associate me with *Ranma 1/2*'s Gambling King? Have I ever mentioned anything about wanting to throw playing cards? If anything, I'd rather be Genma

and whack people with Japanese signs. And if you ever do *Fan-Ed Fracas*, make sure to include Jared Jones or Greg Meyers as Dandy-type characters... you know, as a favor to me.

Nice idea having Byron and Jypsky guest-edit, although I think you missed something... how the hell can they type with big, clunky paws like that? Well, you're right about the editorial looking like Josh's column from the double issue. Speaking of which, don't be surprised when the 'zine review column from the TDS/VZ double issue turns out to be "Chris and Al's Now Playing"... lord knows how two REAL people are going to do an article like that, but we'll figure out something.

The Staff of Might... sort of funny, but what about something like "The Staff Infection"? Let me guess, you already used that one [uh huh... -ed.]. That's the only other one I can think of, so this whole paragraph is pretty much garbage... let's add to it. How ever did I get the adjective "spastic" attached to my name? And why the hell is my hair so curly? My picture looks more like Ben Savage with man-boobs than it does me. Oh well.

I have to wonder about "What Is Cute?"'s page layout... it would seem that the layout of the page should be cute in keeping with the article, but instead it seems pretty stiff... intentional irony?

The Squeezins Jet article sounds pretty outdated: "*Marvel vs. Capcom* is out now", "I'm going to pick up [*Vampire Savior*] when it's released"... maybe an update before printing was in order. Well, the rest of the article and the page itself contained content that could hardly be considered time-sensitive, so I guess it works out all right.

To Bad American Cartoons: Sure, *The Simpsons* is slipping, but for me at least, even the reruns are good since my father's so into the show now... every one's new to him.

"Homer! Have you been up all night eating cheese?"
"I think I'm blind."

I liked the review section, although I can't raise my eyebrow like you have it in the picture... trust me, I've tried! I really want to be able to do that [Maybe Alan Colmes from the Fox News Channel could help you with that...-ed.]. 3/5ths Man and the other characters were pretty funny...

I didn't think you'd ACTUALLY put a picture of me throwing a turnip at you at the end of *El Libro*, but... okay. Maybe in the next issue there can be a picture of me lifting you over my head and tossing you at Birdo.

Fan-Ed Fracas was interesting (there's Ben Savage again with the big card), but there's something I HAVE to say... what is the deal with you abbreviating everything with the first three or so letters of each word? I've seen you do this with everything from *FanFrac* to

SamSho. What's next, *MorKom*? I just hope you don't try to change our names to *JesRag*, *AIRic*, and *ChrisKo* (which would be really funny and oddly ironic in an of itself).

Don't worry, I'm just kidding around... Well, I guess that's about it. Overall a great issue. Damn, though... now I REALLY want to get *Marvel Super Heroes!* Four meg RAM cartridge support AND Anita? Whoa! Can't wait to find it.

KONNICHIWA AND A THOUSAND HAPPY GREETINGS!

Hey, Bashi! What're you doing here?

FUCK YOU, GAJJIN! PISS OFF!

Oh, wait, that's Joe Santulli.

Chris

My dear boy, I've missed nothing! Jypsky can type, but he doesn't really need to... instead, he writes everything down in his HyperTech personal data assistant, which transfers data to my desktop publisher at a rate of 56,000,000 bps. Byron-who's also too young to write- just describes the games while I type in his observations. It's a little like what that *Dominion* guy was doing with Mark Cullison, although Byron is a bit more mature.

By the way, I know what you're thinking, and yes, I realize I've put entirely much too much thought into this...

Annyway... I'm glad you liked the issue, and I'm sorry about the way your caricatures turned out. Just keep in mind that it's hard to work from a picture like the one in *Video Zone* #24 whose quality had been negatively affected by scanning, printing, and copying. Now that I have a color photo, however, you can rest assured that you'll no longer appear in GRB with curly hair and, er, man-boobs.

Just for the record, I should point out that I don't hate EVERY episode of *The Simpsons*... I can think of nearly a million hilarious quotes from the show's first five seasons, but since Oakley/Weinstein and then Mike Scully took the creative reigns, it's just gotten, well, dull. Even the episodes that start out great slowly creep into mediocrity toward the end. To name an example, the one where Homer and his family dine out at a novelty steak house was hilarious at first, but his foray into the secret world of truck driving just wasn't that funny... even the chase scene at the end didn't get much of a rise out of me (unless getting off the couch to change the channel counts).

But that's OK... the first few episodes of *Futurama* seem to indicate that it will pick up where *The Simpsons* left off (without Bart, mercifully), and *Family Guy* has that warped sense of humor which made *The Critic* so much fun to watch. Let's just hope both shows last a little longer than Jon Lovitz's did...



Sweet Dreams...?

I must admit that I was very skeptical of the Dreamcast when it first debuted in Japan six months ago. It was incredibly frustrating to watch normally rational people praise the system to the heavens when the bitter taste of the Saturn's demise still weighed so heavily on my tongue. Thus, I decided to take a stand against the system. It wasn't long before another fan-ed criticized me for this, claiming that I needed to actually SEE the Dreamcast in action to fairly judge it. I hate to admit it, but he was right. It took a first-hand experience with Sega's 128-bit powerhouse to understand what all the excitement was about...

So there I was, hanging out at the Elcon Mall with my aunt, her ex-husband, and their two screaming grandchildren. We were searching in vain for a Tucson restaurant which had recently relocated... I had no idea that I would come face to face with Sega's latest and most anticipated game system instead.

It was at the mall's Software Etc., running a demo of *Sonic Adventure* (y'know, the game every Saturn owner had been begging Sega to release since 1995... but let's not open that wound right now). I pulled myself away from the slick full-motion video intro just long enough to ask the rest of the fam for a few minutes... just enough time to see if my contempt for the system was warranted. I took a quick glance at the Dreamcast itself and was a little surprised by its appearance... the system was smaller and more delicate than the early pictures in *Tips & Tricks* seemed to suggest, bearing a slight resemblance to something you might find hanging on the wall of a ladies' room in a Japanese restaurant. Because it seemed more likely to dispense tampons than play killer video games, I was convinced momentarily that the system was a mock-up and the footage I'd seen was actually running from a VCR.

After coming to my senses and realizing my mistake, I approached the sales clerk and casually remarked, "So... I see you have the Dreamcast." Not taking the bait, he replied, "Heh, yes... you mean the Dreamcast." I watched a conversation between Sonic and his female counterpart Amy Rose before resuming my own discussion with the man behind the counter. "I'm sorry... I just call it the 'Reamcast' because I get the feeling that Sega will do to Dreamcast owners what they did to everyone who bought a Saturn."

"You're entitled to that opinion," the clerk replied, "but Sega means business this time. The Dreamcast is an incredible system, and licensees have been lining up for blocks to design games for it. Besides, with Sega, Hitachi, and Microsoft behind it, how can it go wrong?"

I was too distracted by *Sonic Adventure* to mention that Hitachi manufactured the Saturn hardware as well and that Bill Gates' last stab at the video game market (the MSX, a computer designed primarily to play games like Konami's *Penguin Adventure*) was a miserable failure in the United States. A simple "Good point..." was all I could muster as I stared at Amy Rose, who was wandering through a beautifully rendered hall. The petite pink hedgehog looked as though she were made of plastic rather than polygons, but this phenomenal detail came at a price... I noticed just a touch of slowdown as Amy approached a cache of rings.

Almost as if embarrassed by its mistake, the Dreamcast quickly faded out and returned to the *Sonic Adventure* title screen.

There were a small stack of CDs on a shelf behind the counter. I politely asked, "Could I see another game?". To my surprise, the clerk agreed and reached for a disc on the shelf. "I suppose I could put *Power Stone* in..." There was no holding back my astonishment- my jaw dropped as he opened the system's drive door and swapped discs. "Holy cow!", I shouted, instantly shattering what little remained of my facade of disinterest. "That game isn't even out in arcades yet!" The clerk smiled and proudly announced, "That's the beauty of the Naomi hardware. Arcade conversions take no time at all because the Dreamcast is nearly identical to Sega's newest arcade board."

I couldn't wait to see Capcom's next big fighting game, but I would have to... the Dreamcast requested four blocks of memory, as no save card was loaded into the system's controller. Perplexed, I asked, "Doesn't the Dreamcast have internal memory?". Hesitant to answer, the clerk sheepishly replied, "Well... the Dreamcast saves the date, time, and basic system data, but no, you can't save games to its internal memory like you can with the Saturn." He then fiddled with the Dreamcast's BIOS screen and finally coaxed the game to run. I was a bit disappointed by this news... it's hard to imagine why Sega would force its customers to buy pricey add-ons after they'd created the ultimate save system for the Saturn. Perhaps they wanted to create an interest in their handheld VMS unit and SNK's Neo-Geo Pocket, but heaven knows the world doesn't need another portable game system, let alone two.

After a title screen which seemed to last forever, *Power Stone*'s attract mode finally began, giving the Dreamcast a chance to redeem itself. I wasn't sure what to think of the opening- the hand-drawn characters looked sharp but strongly resembled the cast of Sunsoft's *Waku Waku 7*- but the actual game was very impressive. I watched in awe as the combatants scurried around a lavishly detailed, beautifully lit room, collecting gems and hurling pots at one another. Suddenly, after collecting a third jewel, one of the fighters was bathed in a swirl of bright light and emerged clad in a scarlet helmet and body armor. In a flash, I responded in my best Dennis Miller: "Whoa... go, go Power Rangers!" I could almost feel the clerk wince as he muttered, "You just had to mention that, didn't you?" Well, hey, who could resist?

Conscious of the time, I thanked the Software Etc. employee for his and went on my way. As I walked back to the car with the rest of the family to resume our search for the perfect buffet restaurant, I'd marvelled at how much my mind had changed about the Dreamcast. I still have doubts about its chances of success here in the States, but the system is incredibly powerful, and the list of titles planned for the Dreamcast's stateside launch (which include such hits as *Marvel vs. Capcom*, *House of the Dead 2*, and the incredibly weird but incredibly fun *Jojo's Venture*) would tempt any self-respecting gamer.

I just hope Sega gets its act together this time... Sony has become arrogant, lazy, and most importantly, vulnerable thanks to the success of its Playstation. This is Sega's best and only chance to plunge a sword into the heart of its competition and become a driving force in the industry, just as it had in 1991, when Nintendo's refusal to obsolete the NES gave the more advanced Genesis a head start in the next generation system wars. The Dreamcast needs to strike a chord with players secretly disgusted with the currently abysmal quality of the Playstation's software library... If Sega can capitalize on Sony's insane decision to bring the Rugrats to a 32-bit game system, and claim that the Dreamcast is intended solely for serious players, this could severely damage the Playstation's reputation as technologically advanced and pave the way for another Sega revolution. If Sega doesn't take advantage of Sony's momentary weakness, their last chance for glory will be extinguished, and the Dreamcast will be just that... a beautiful illusion which will fade from the memories of gamers everywhere in an instant.



'ZINA:

ΩΑΤΤΙΟΤ ΠΕΩΣΙΕΤΤΕΤΣ

For this installment of the fanzine reviews, I thought I'd try something a little different, and perhaps controversial... instead of giving all the 'zines I've received the standard once-over (something that isn't really feasible considering how few I've gotten in the last three months), I'm going to present my list of the top ten video game fanzines ever published. Don't get too upset if you're not included on the list... this is only my personal opinion, and the fanzines I'm including are (actually, were, since many are no longer in publication) absolutely terrific.

In the interest of objectivity, I've made *The Gameroom Blitz* ineligible for the honor, and the fanzines that were included will be listed in random order. Finally, you won't find *Digital Press* here, either, because its editor is under the impression that DP has evolved past the term "fanzine", or something. Frankly, I stopped trying to understand Joe Santulli a long time ago... but let's not go down that road! Anyways, on to the list.

**BEST CLASSIC SYSTEMS COVERAGE
(BUT WORST FASHION SENSE):**

THE LASER

(and its progeny)

The Laser, *Escapist*, *MMCC*... whatever you call it, it's a terrific publication with a perspective on classic video games unlike any other. Rather than ponder to anal retentive collectors and print incredibly long, incredibly BORING lists of 2600 releases, Mike Palisano offers long, detailed opinions of titles for a wide variety of consoles released before the infamous crash of 1984. I must admit, the freaky poetry and artwork take some getting used to- I wasn't sure what to think when I first came face to stony face with a expressionless phantom of a woman in a surreal polka-dotted frock- but the classic systems coverage in *The Laser* is so good, you'll find it easy to accept (or at least tolerate) Mike's rather unique forms of artistic expression.

**BEST RESURRECTION OF AN ALREADY
GREAT FANZINE:**

Above and Beyond

Most fanzine editors from the hobby's second era were treated to *In Between the Lines*, a publication which bridged the gap between punk and video games with its deadly accurate reviews and forceful social commentary. However, Sean Pettibone's newsletter was not without its flaws... his tirades against authority figures grew tiresome quickly, and often came at a price to what little game coverage was available in each eight page issue. Luckily, Sean's spiritual successor, Tom Donoho, took everything that was great about IBTL and improved it, increasing the page count and sharpening its focus on video games. The end result was the spectacular *Above and Beyond*.

**BEST FANZINE DISGUISED AS A
NEWSLETTER:**

Next Generation

At first glance, you'd think that Casey Loe's *Next Generation* was a card-carrying member of the legion of stuffy, pseudo-professional newsletters that were popular in fandom circa 1993. Look past the attractive color cover, however, and you'll find wonderfully entertaining reviews filled with desk-pounding, tear-streamingly funny observations. Add to this extensive import coverage and a hilarious anti-mascot (a two-bit Italian thug who throws T*HQ loving simpletons around like rag dolls) and you've got a real, honest to goodness fanzine, and a damned good one at that. It still boggles my mind to think that Casey migrated to the excreble *DieHard GameFan* just a few short years after *Next Generation's* demise...

MOST VERSATILE FANZINE:

FANTAZINE

There's a page for every occasion in this comprehensive, smartly written fanzine by Pat Reynolds. Whether you're looking for great artwork, informal reviews, amusing anecdotes, or fierce editorial content, *Fantazine* has you covered... it's all here, and every bit as good as in more specialized publications. Anyone interested in testing the waters of fandom would be wise to send for *Fantazine* first... it has the best overall content of any of the 'zines listed here.

**BEST FANZINE THAT DEFIES
CATEGORIZATION:**

SLAP-DASH

Speaking of versatility, here's someone who can (and usually will!) talk about nearly everything... video games, beer, his unfortunate incidents with a skinhead who called himself Satan; you name it. It doesn't

matter what it is... Russ Perry, Jr. can take any event in his life and weave it into a mystifying tale that always leaves his readers spellbound. It's a talent worthy of the greatest bards, and a quality which makes Russ's fanzine *Slap-Dash* impossible to resist (even when he's covering everything BUT video games in the most minute detail).

BEST WACKY FANZINE:

Matrix³

This was an incredibly hard decision to make... there are a lot of 'zines with that "one granola bar short of completely nuts" writing style that were very entertaining. One of them, *Infestation*, almost made it on the list, but was barely edged out by Jeremy Statz' *Matrix³*. While *Infestation* is a lot of fun to read, *Matrix³'s* various articles seem more sharply focused, especially Jeremy's savage and wildly inventive parody of Nintendo's old Super NES advertorials. There was an equally funny article in *Infestation* which took potshots at the RARE release *Donkey Kong Country*, but Alan didn't take the time to properly structure the piece, cutting off the dialogue at the end and announcing, "And then, the article abruptly stopped". It's a small detail, but as anyone who plays video games should know, little things do mean a lot.

BEST FANZINE IN NEED OF MEDICATION:

Video Apocalypse

Flying cows? Puzzling references to clam chowder? And conversations about body hair? The only way Josh Lesnick's fanzine could have been more surreal is if the postage stamps on the back were laced with acid, but you've gotta admit, *Video Apocalypse* was just as entertaining as it was crazy... and it was very, very crazy. That's not to say that you couldn't find strong opinions hidden amidst the bloody head fairies and cans of Spam... in fact, Josh had plenty to add to the debates raging in fandom at the time, discussing such topics as video game censorship and the always controversial GEA with remarkable insight. Well, for a guy who blasted a bunny out of a cannon just a few pages earlier, at least.

**MOST INTELLECTUALLY STIMULATING
FANZINE:**

MASTERminds

Edited by Sega Master System enthusiast Todd Lintner, *MASTERminds* rejected the dumb and surreal humor of its peers, and instead opted for editorials, reviews, and satire which made you think. This made *MASTERminds* a very hot property in 1993 despite its fairly simple layout and minimal artwork... both fanzine and prozine editors were singing its praises, even after Todd halted publication of the newsletter in late 1994. The accolades were more than deserved, though... *MASTERminds* was an

outstanding effort.

THE SULTAN OF SMARM: GB8B

This label, given to the late Phil Hartman, also describes Brian Pacula's last fanzine perfectly. But don't take that the wrong way... *The Good, The Bad, and The 8-Bit* (GB8B for short) was wickedly funny, with brutally honest commentary that made you chuckle and wince all at once. Brian's best material was always his most controversial... nothing demonstrates this better than Roadside Comics, a simply but effectively drawn series starring Brian himself and, in one instance, Arnie Katz's pet chimp Stinky, an ape trained to write fanzine reviews for EGM2. Brian became pretty bitter in the last two issues of GB8B, but there's still no denying his obvious talent as a writer and satirist.

BEST FANZINE YOU CAN'T PUT DOWN: Video Zone

Chris Kohler's *Video Zone* is like an addiction... I find myself leafing through issues released months and even years ago. Why? Well, for starters, VZ is packed with information, and not stupid information like the release dates of *Tomb Raider 136* and a Playstation adaption of *Doug's First Movie*. This is decidedly more imaginative, including pictures and descriptions of weird peripherals like a device that turns your GameBoy into a fishing scanner (assuming you haven't already thrown it into the lake...). Then there's the reviews. Chris leaves nothing to the imagination in his opinions of great titles like *Mischief Makers* and *Panzer Dragoon Saga*, making you feel as though you've played them yourself. Finally, *Video Zone* is hilarious! If the *Street Fighter: The Movie* review on one page doesn't leave you howling, the ad for a *Super Mario Bros.* movie game on the next almost certainly will. Chris has already published 28 issues of *Video Zone*, and I hope he continues well into the next century... I just can't get enough of this 'zine!

BEST FANZINE... FOR ME TO POOP ON! MEGAMANIA

With all due respect to Triumph the Insult Comic Dog, this fanzine is poop. I mean, really, what were Jim Pittaro and his brother Mike THINKING when they made this thing!? Everything about *MegaMania* just oozes putridity... from the lame cover (oooh! *Mortal Kombat vs. Street Fighter!* That wasn't even original when *Paradox* did it months prior to this fanzine's release) to the almost constant typos and horrid print quality to the inexcusably dumb pseudonyms to the creepy silhouette of Sonic on the back (tell me that's his thumb... somebody PLEASE tell me that's his thumb!), this is, without a doubt, the worst video game fanzine ever inflicted upon mankind.

Where Have All The Fanzines Gone? (doo do do, doo do do...)

As you've probably noticed, there aren't many video game fanzines still left in circulation. Please keep fandom alive by supporting the ones that are still around! Each of these 'zines cost around \$2 each, except Matt Leone's *Event*, which will set you back \$3 but features a snazzy color cover. Remember, we're counting on you to keep us going!

Pat Reynolds
Fantazine

Russ Perry, Jr.,
Slap-Dash / 2600 Connection

Mike Palisano
The Laser

Chris Kohler
Video Zone

Al Riccitelli, Jr.
The Dark Side

Rick Florey
Overkill

Eric Longdin
Splat!

Greg Wilcox
Continue?

Ben Leatherman
Fanarchy

Matt Leone
Event

I never thought it would happen, but after a trade with *Continue?*'s Greg Wilcox, I am now the proud... er, make that reasonably satisfied, owner of a Sony Playstation. Here's my impression of the most memorable games on the demo disc that was included with the package. Note the Dual Shock rating after each review... this gauges the impact the Dual Shock vibration has on each title.

Wild 9: A fun, futuristic platformer with an inventive new weapon, or just warmed over *Earthworm Jim*? You make the call. The latest collaborative effort between David Perry and artist Doug TenNapel is a solid effort, but *Wild 9* is remarkably shallow, even with its ability to snag enemies with a laser lasso and drop them into a variety of nasty traps. Like *Jim*, 9's touches of humor make it seem more entertaining than it really is. Ⓢ DS ▷▷▷

CRASH BANDICOOT: WARPED: Still more vapid platforming action from the creators of the smash hit fighting game *Way of the Warrior* (welcome to *Sarcasm 101!*). The demo stars Crash's kid sister in a very brief romp across the Great Wall of China... it looks nice and plays well, but leaves the player wanting more, just like the other games. By the way, I hate to admit it, but I like really like *Coco*. It's a shame she's not available throughout the entire game... Ⓢ DS ▷▷▷

METAL GEAR SOLID: This is so much of a departure from the cerebral *Commando* clones of the past that it's created its own genre, spawning such titles as *Tenchu* and *Syphon Filter*. *Solid*'s qualities aren't immediately obvious, but once you get past the initial frustration of learning how to sidestep your foes (and die a half dozen times in the process), you'll be absorbed by the strong acting and storyline. Ⓢ DS ▷▷▷

SPYRO THE DRAGON: Many games have attempted to capitalize on the success of *Super Mario 64*, but only *Spyro the Dragon* manages to perform at the level of this N64 classic. In fact, it's better in some respects... the graphics are unbelievably crisp and vibrant, with great details like the glistening gems and flowers gently swaying in the breeze. Better yet, the element of exploration that made *Super Mario 64* so fun is here as well... even the demo is huge! Ⓢ DS ▷▷▷

GRAN TOURISMO: Yes, *Gran Turismo* is a well done racing simulation, but the *Ridge Racer* series is still my personal favorite in this category. I don't care for *Gran*'s realistic (and grainy!) visual style, and the hums of the cars' engines are pretty unconvincing... I'd go as far as to call them 8-bit in quality. Greg has told me that the demo isn't an accurate representation of the actual game, but nevertheless, I think I'll hold out for R4. Ⓢ DS ▷▷▷

BRAVE FENCER MUSASHI: Squaresoft's quirky action adventure is a fine alternative to *Zelda: The Ocarina of Time* if you don't have a Nintendo64 (and really, who does?). *Fencer*'s thin platforms and difficult jumps can be bothersome, but the game does offer plenty of variety... *Musashi* can scale walls a'la *Crazy Climber* and steal magic from his enemies, further augmenting his already impressive arsenal of attacks. Don't listen to Chris, though; the voice-overs really bite. Ⓢ DS ▷▷▷



Resistance is useless.
You will join us.



MARVEL SUPER HEROES VS. STREET FIGHTER

Capcom Japan
Chris Kohler
SATURN: ©

Following on the success of Capcom's arcade and Saturn smash *X-Men vs. Street Fighter* comes the pseudo-sequel/upgrade *Marvel Super Heroes vs. Street Fighter*. A team of Street Fighters and Marvel comic characters has answered the call from Professor X or somebody to defeat the evil head and arm, Apocalypse. Before they can fight Apocalypse, however, they must beat the hell out of each other.

In true Jess Ragan fashion, I've taken to labeling this game "Super X-Men vs. Street Fighter 2 Turbo With Almonds", mostly because it's an upgrade rather than a true sequel. The same backgrounds are used, with some added detail, and the gameplay remains just about the same: you pick two fighters and tag-team in and out while kicking the asses of your opponent's two fighters. The Saturn version is, like the 4-Meg games before it, an arcade-perfect translation, with minimal loading time and beautiful animation.

Of course, *Marvel Super Heroes vs. Street Fighter* does have its advantages over the previous release. Gone are most of the pitiful X-Men, replaced with some of Marvel's better-known characters like Spider-Man, Captain America, and The Incredible Hulk. And the questionable *X-Men vs. Street Fighter* lineup of Street Fighters has been streamlined and filled out with the removal of the never-played Cammy and the addition of perennial Shotokan fighters Sakura and Dan. Of course, the character lineup has its losers, also...fighting on the Street, there's Zangief, Dhalsim, and Nash (as the hidden Shadow), and on the Marvel side, we've got the amorphous Shuma Gorath and the cheap-assed bastard Wolverine.

What *Marvel Super Heroes vs. Street Fighter* really does better than its predecessor, though, is that it is a much more exciting experience - it's the game that *X-Men vs. Street Fighter* tried to be. Marvel is bigger, with more and better characters, outrageous attacks, and loud, obnoxious explosions. The intro is a perfect example of this, with the (English-speaking) announcer, who screams, "Are you ready, true believers? Capcom and Marvel have teamed up once again to bring you MARVEL SUPER HEROES vs. STREET FIGHTER!", among other things. The announcer even screams out the names of super moves as they display on screen, should you defeat your opponent with one.

If *X-Men vs. Street Fighter* left a yucky taste in your mouth, give *Marvel Super Heroes vs. Street Fighter* a try. With new characters, more detail, and a more exciting atmosphere, this is the "big" game that XvSF wanted to be in the first place.



Star Wars: Rogue Squadron

Nintendo
Brian Pacula
N64: ©

A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away, the closest you could come to being a badass X-Wing jockey was the vector-based *Star Wars* arcade game. Following the dark cultural vortex known as the late 80's, a new hope for would-be Rebel pilots arrived: *Rebel Assault*, the classic computer CD-ROM game. It wasn't much more advanced in terms of gameplay than the original arcade game, but it was popular, looked gorgeous, and opened the door for quality follow-ups like *X-Wing*, *TIE Fighter*, et al. *Rogue Squadron* is the latest of the genre, and it takes a step back from the detailed and realism-oriented feel of the other recent starfighter games.

The game, as the designers have confessed, is basically an extrapolation

of the Snowspeeder level in *Shadows of the Empire*, in that all of the missions take place over exotic planets (rather than deep space), with the emphasis on action rather than simulation. At your disposal are the X-Wing, Y-Wing, A-Wing, V-Wing, Millennium Falcon, Snowspeeder, TIE Fighter, and Skyhopper, with the glaring and inexcusable omission of the B-Wing. I realize the game is supposed to take place in between episodes 4 and 5, which predates the creation of the B-Wing, but the last mission in the game is the Battle of Mon Calamari, which doesn't take place until six years after Return of the Jedi, episode 6.

Shut up.

Rogue Squadron can't quite match the immersive gameplay of *X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter*, but it's a hell of a lot better than *Rebel Assault* and its sequel. The missions can be excruciatingly difficult (taking down AT-AT walkers with tow cables is a laborious and titchy process), and you have to do it over and over again QUICKLY in the Escape from Fest level. No fun at all!, but the graphics and level design are wonderful. Spend some time on Tatooine and absorb and appreciate all the landmarks and characters (then kill them). It's lovely. The game is sure to jostle the innards of all hardcore Star Wars fans and those with delusions of starfighter acery, but the dicey learning curve is a pain, and gamers weaned on the masterful *X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter* may find it lacking.



WWF WARZONE

Acclaim
Jess Ragan
N64: ©

Now this was a pleasant surprise. I'm usually not especially fond of wrestling games, but *WWF Warzone* is a definite exception. It's also provided an invaluable service by showing me just why the wrestling games of the past have never been able to capture the fast-paced fun of the outrageous pseudo-sport... they were all in 2D. Let's face it, before the advent of polygonal technology, these games were just *Double Dragon* clones, set within the confines of a crudely drawn wrestling ring. Sure, some of them let you leave the ring briefly to pick up weapons, and others had eye-popping, jaw-dropping holds and throws, but they all lacked realism and technique... in titles like *Three Count Bout* and *Wrestlefest*, the victories always went to the swiftest of thumb.

Not anymore. *WWF Warzone* affords the player true 3D movement, resulting in a game that feels more like actual wrestling and less like the thinly veiled reflex tests of the past. You and your opponent react naturally to blows, and position and distance must be taken into account before you can pull off your fighter's most damaging attacks. The game plays beautifully with Nintendo's analog stick... it's a cinch to sidestep, retreat, and generally make life miserable for the other player, a feature that was sorely lacking in Acclaim's previous WWF licensed games.

One could say that *Warzone's* only flaw was its association with the World Wrestling Federation... I sure as hell would, because I lost all respect for the franchise after it lost most of its classic fighters to the WCW and replaced them with gimmicky losers like Mankind and Val Venis (wrestler by day, porn star by night? Anyone who wondered if there was a direct link between professional wrestling and homoeroticism needn't wonder anymore...). However, Acclaim cleverly worked around this by offering the player a custom character mode which lets them create their own fighters. The number of customization options is staggering to say the very least, but the process of creating wrestlers is so simple and straightforward that even a beginner could whip up his own musclebound moron in a matter of minutes (now THAT'S alliteration! Um, er, sorry...). I was able to make a reasonable facsimile of Goldberg with a little experimentation, then

thrust him into the ring against a WWF not-so-superstar named The Rock, who looks like the unfortunate product of a sinister plan to create a master race with the DNA of Rob Schneider.

So for you insane wrestling fans who've been waiting over fifteen years for a game that does your favorite pastime justice... well, get a life, but get WWF *Warzone* first. My advice to everyone else: rent a copy of the game and bring a few friends along for the ride. You're sure to agree that this, not *Ehrgeiz*, is the 3D fighting game to beat.



Satan's Hollow

Midway
Jess Ragan
ARCADE: ⑦

I've always been a sucker for a good *Galaxian* clone, and this one's creepy occultic theme and original gameplay make it impossible to resist. *Satan's Hollow* adds more than just a controversial setting to the slide and shoot play mechanics that were first explored in *Space Invaders* and greatly improved in *Galaxian*... the goal of the game has changed significantly, requiring the player to collect girders from a flock of stone-hurling, dive-bombing gargoyles to build a bridge to a frightening confrontation with Satan or one of his minions. These quasi-bosses will crumble with one hit, but your victories will not come easily... some, like the ferocious Beezlebub, belch a deadly stream of fire that's literally impossible to avoid. It's a good thing you have a rechargeable shield at your disposal... believe me, you'll be using it a lot! If you manage to crush the forces of darkness, you'll be awarded an extra gun (a power-up system in a game released before the crash? It sounds too good to be true, but it is!) and a more aggressive swarm of those hideous green gargoyles.

Sometimes, it really can be hell in the land they call Satan's Hollow... for instance, the graphics are an odd mixture of high-definition sprites & overly tiled-and often downright ugly!- backgrounds. Also, as the game progresses, the lake of fire protecting Satan and his cronies becomes wider and wider, limiting your range of movement to the point where you cannot dodge the enemies' endless rain of fire and brimstone. This becomes even worse when the sneaky red gargoyles swoop down in an attempt to steal lives from your reserves... unlike *Galago*, there is no benefit for rescuing a captured ship aside from getting it back. As was mentioned earlier, you can increase your firepower by slaying demons, but once your ship is destroyed, all those extra gunmounts are lost.

Satan's Hollow is rumored to be one of the six games on the next *Arcade's Greatest Hits Midway Collection* for the Playstation, along with *Wizard of War* and the underrated but extremely cool *Gorf*. With a line-up like this, you'd be crazy not to pick up a copy... I know I'm going to be the first in line for it! Cheapskates can also download *Satan's Hollow* from the Internet and play it on MAME, but those with slow computers would be much better off waiting for the official Playstation release.



Marvel vs. Capcom

Capcom
Pat Reynolds
COIN: ③; DCAST: ③

I finally had a chance to play the latest in Capcom's *Marvel vs.* series, and I must say I love it!

Unlike the somewhat disappointing second game in the series, which offered no totally new characters at all, *Marvel vs. Capcom* brings in five brand new, never before seen in a fighting game combatants as well as a veritable mob of "buddy" characters.

While some of the *Marvel* characters who are working on their third game with little change to their styles are beginning to show their age, the addition of Captain Commando, Strider Hiryu, Jin, and Mega Man (!!!) more than make up for this. Add to that the first appearance of a *Darkstalkers* character (Morrigan) in the *Marvel vs.* series, and the variety offered here is almost endless. The absence of several popular *Street Fighter* characters may turn away fans of the series (admittedly, I would have rather had "Street Fighter vs. Capcom", too), but there is a cool new move for Ryu which allows him to emulate the fighting styles of both Akuma and Ken at the cost of one level of your energy bar. Chun-Li and Zangief also make return appearances. New to the *Marvel* cast is Spider-Man's arch-rival Venom.

What really sets this game above the crowd is the sheer level of

technique available here. There are regular super moves, team supers, and team counters as usual, but there are also the ultra-cool new custom team super combos, which let the player control both characters for several seconds with an unlimited super gauge! The can of whoopass you can open with this attack must be seen to be believed. But that's not all... at the start of each round, you are given a buddy character (one of several *Marvel* or *Capcom* characters including Jubilee, Juggernaut, Anita, and The Forgotten Warrior to name a few) who can be called on to leap into the battle and attack a finite number of times.

For fans of *Capcom's* fighting games, *Marvel vs. Capcom* is a dream come true... I've been dreaming of a fighting game with *Mega Man* and *Strider* for years!



Panzer Dragoon Saga

Sega (Andromeda)
Jess Ragan
SATURN: ⑤

By now you've heard countless reviewers (including Moltar in a surprise segment on Cartoon Network's *Toonami* programming block) describe how great this game really is by detailing its immersive gameplay, spellbinding music, innovative design, blah blah blah... so I'll approach this from another tack. Here's a list of reasons why I'm not an RPG fan, and what *Panzer Dragoon Saga* has done to distance itself from standard role-playing conventions, making it the first game of its kind that I actually bothered to finish. Feel free to shout "What!?" after each rhetorical question I ask if that gets your ya-yas up.

You know what I hate about RPGs? Endless battles with a combat interface that's about as interesting as a cup of uncooked Minute Rice. You select your course of action with a series of menus, then trade blows with the opposing forces until one party is mashed into compost or runs for their miserable lives. It's like *Windows95* with a probability factor and the occasional squirt of blood! But *Panzer Dragoon Saga* doesn't follow this path... it adds a sense of urgency and involvement to its fights. You've got to dart around and select the right weapon for your enemies to lessen your own damage and maximize theirs. And, of course, since this is all happening in real-time, you won't HAVE time to get bored.

You know what I hate about RPGs? Stale graphics and characters that look more like Beanie Babies than hardened warriors. It's very hard to ROLE PLAY when you're surrounded by scenery straight out of a *Care Bears* episode and your "barbarian" looks like he'd be more at home on the top shelf of a twelve year old girl's bedroom. Well, forget all that! *Panzer Dragoon Saga* has a unique post-apocalyptic visual style, and its cast members are fully articulated for that always cool action figure look. What's more, the battle scenes will take your breath away, with beautifully animated, otherworldly enemies and an illusion of flight so real you'll be tempted to break out a comb every time you land.

You know what I hate about RPGs? Cliche'd storylines that read like a passage from a bad fairy tale. You know the kind... boy meets girl, girl is abducted, boy frees girl from the clutches of a dastardly villain, boy wakes up before he can get anything more than a kiss for all his hard work (paging Dr. Miyamoto...). Fortunately, Team Andromeda has more respect for our intelligence, and gave us a plot with some real depth. *Panzer's* world has a detailed history (revealed in a series of books you'll find as you explore new towns and forge friendships with other characters), and the stunning conclusion will leave you staring at the screen slackjawed in disbelief.

You know what I hate about RPGs? Tedious level building and stupidly cryptic objectives. I felt like shooting myself by the time I wandered back and forth mindlessly killing enemies for hour after monotonous hour in games like *Zelda II* and *Hydlide*. And if Square is such a master of this genre, why haven't they realized after ten years that people just don't like searching every millimeter of an area for a damned crystal goblet, just to return the trinket to a miserably ungrateful non-player character who opens up whole new opportunities to search even MORE land for even MORE worthless crap? *Panzer Dragoon Saga* throws these annoyances out the window by giving the player enough opportunities to level up on the way to the next town, so they don't have to fly back and forth seven thousand times to survive the next boss encounter. Moreover, the game is linear enough to make hunting down items enjoyable, but not so much so that you'll beat it in a few hours.

You know what I REALLY hate about RPGs? DUNGEONS!!! Those creepy, claustrophobic caverns crawling with high-level monsters just waiting to stick a fang into my veins make me want to chuck a grenade into the entrances and pretend they never existed at all. *Panzer Dragoon Saga* has just one dungeon... ONE. And it's in the monolith at the end of the game. You don't even have to explore it thoroughly if you don't want to, and frankly, I don't. Thank you, Sega, for stopping the insanity with this one simple gesture.

You know what? I don't hate RPGs anymore. And if that doesn't make

those of you who never did jump through a plate glass window, fall from a ten story building, and run forty miles to the nearest used game store for a Saturn and Panzer Dragoon Saga, I don't know what would.



R-TYPE

Delta

Irem of Japan
Pat Reynolds
PSX: Ⓜ

R-Type and I have had a long history together. I'm certain there are any number of hardcore gamers who feel the same way. I had a love/hate relationship with it the arcades over a decade ago. I bought the Master System version, the Turbografx-16 version, and the Super NES version dubbed (what else?) Super R-Type. When I have some spare cash, I have every intention of purchasing R-Types, Irem's perfectly reproduced collection of both the original R-Type and its sequel. So it was with much anticipation that I awaited the arrival of my friend Adrian one Saturday night not long ago, for he had rented the Japanese version of the latest game in the saga, R-Type Delta, and was bringing it over, since his Playstation is woefully mod-chip deprived.

Here's the deal. R-Type Delta is totally polygonal, much like Square's *Einhander*, but thankfully, Irem made the wise decision not to stray far from the series' strictly side-view, 2D roots. This means that while the game occasionally throws your little R-Type fighter into a skewed perspective, it mostly sticks to the side view we all know and love.

From a gameplay perspective, this is classic R-Type. The R-9 handles exactly as you remember, and the weapons and power-ups are familiar. The game also gives you a couple of new R-Type starfighters to choose from, although purists will stay with the R-9. Each ship has its own set of weapons and power shots, adding to the replay value.

And of course, the difficulty is notched up somewhere between the neighborhoods of "Not bloody likely" and "There's no way you're getting past level four and that's a promise." Limited continues help ensure that this game will keep you suitably frustrated for weeks. Adrian and I managed to get halfway through level three, and I think Adrian may have actually cleared the stage long after I'd retired for the evening, but he didn't get much further. The classic R-Type toughness has been retained.

So, if you have infinite patience and are a fan of the series, I heartily recommend R-Type Delta. If you're the type that breaks things when you get angry, stay away from this game. This is the way classic game updates should be handled.



MONSTER PARTY

Bandai
Byron
NES: Ⓜ

Wow... where the heck did everyone go? Geez, after the last issue, you'd think Jess would have let us do more than one stinkin' review. Well, Elle got to say something sarcastic on the front of the issue, but heck, she's always doing stuff like that. Just see if me and my friends ever do HIM any more favors!

Uh, speaking of the review, I'd better start writin' one, huh? Bandai made a lot of duds for the NES, but they got lucky and designed *Monster Party*, too. Actually, even this doesn't seem too great at first, but the bosses are what make *Monster Party* really stick out in my mind. I can't think of another game where you can walk into a monster's hideout only to have him tell you that he's already dead (I'm still trying to figure that one out!). And it doesn't end there! You'll get into fights with walking pairs of pants, fried shrimp looking for revenge (wait, these really ARE dead, but they can still attack me!), walls full of eyes, and a dancing mummy who can get really frustrating if you don't know how to beat him. Turns out you have to let him shake his booty until he tires out and turns into a pile of dust. If things become too hard (or weird!) for you, you can become some sort of hawk man who can fly and shoot fireballs and stuff just by downing a pill you'll find in each of the stages.

I'm not gonna say that this is my favorite NES game of all time or something dumb like that. It is pretty fun, and I enjoyed it a lot, but the graphics aren't too great and there's not a lot you can do, even when you're the hawk guy. I'd say if you have an NES (and if not, get one!), buy the really good hop 'n bop action games like *Kirby's Adventure* and *Super Mario Bros. 3* first, then think about picking up *Monster Party*. I mean, heck, why not? With NES games as cheap as they are right now, all you have to lose is a little closet space.

Once Overs...

Final Fantasy VII Role-Playing; Squaresoft; Playstation

Jess performs HYPE BREAK!

Since I don't own a memory card for my brand spankin' new Playstation, I haven't been able to play this for more than an hour, and thus can't give it a complete review. However, my initial impression is that *Final Fantasy VII* is NOT the best role-playing game of all time... heck, from what I can tell, there's not even much role playing involved! Sure, the story is entertaining and surprisingly well translated, but the player's participation in it is so limited that you never feel like one of the characters; just an unseen observer. The graphics are similarly double-edged... you'll be amazed by the backgrounds, but they're also dark and confusing; so much so that Square created a tracking option to keep you from getting lost. There's nothing good about the combat system... overwhelming 3D perspectives and nifty gameplay enhancements aside, these are the same old, lame old battles you've been fighting in every video game RPG since the beginning of time. The gripping story and sharp visuals alone make *Final Fantasy VII* a worthwhile (used) purchase, but don't expect to get much actual gameplay out of it.

Mega Man 8 Action; Capcom; Saturn

Here's an ideal game to review in this issue... let's face it, the only thing that changes about the *Mega Man* series from title to title are the bosses. However, this one is set apart from the rest by a distinct new visual style... everything's in bright pastels, and the animation is very cartoony, apparently benefitting from the Digicel process first explored in *Aladdin* and *Earthworm Jim*. The only downside to this is that the characters are very small, apparently in an attempt to free up the system's limited RAM. The FMV cartoons are very nice, too, but they suffer from terrible voice-overs that (among other things) make our repetitive robot hero sound more like *Girlly Man* than *Mega Man*... in fact, Roll sounds less feminine than he does! Everything else in *Mega Man 8* is basically the same as in the other games, so just rent it and save some tender for the truly unique *Mega Man Legends*.

Rival Schools Fighting; Capcom; Arcade, Playstation

Only the Japanese could come up with something this bizarre. The principals of several school districts are up to something sneaky, so the students rebel, beating the tar out of each other for a while before finally realizing that their beef is with the school authorities. But never mind that... here's all you really need to know! *Rival Schools* is an insane pseudo tag-team fighting game that apes a little from *Tekken* and a whole lot from *Street Fighter EX*. There's even some *Marvel vs. Capcom* thrown in for good measure... smack your opponent with a special punch and your fighters will doubleteam the poor sucker with attacks that vary from devastating (the principal holds his foe in place while the superintendent indulges in a little swordplay) to downright kooky (two of the larger teens grab their enemy by the limbs and beat him against the ground like a dusty rug). Since this is Capcom we're talking about, the gameplay is excellent, and there's more than enough gratuitous party shots to go around (the more gratuitous, the better, I always say!). There's an American Playstation version out now, and I can highly recommend it despite its senseless omission of the edit mode in the Japanese release.

Stinger Shooter; Konami; NES

This localized version of the Japanese hit *Twinbee* is a lot of fun with two players, but suffers a bit where graphics are concerned. It tries to achieve a bright, cartoonish look similar to that of the equally weird *Fantasy Zone* series, but instead looks very amateurish (a far cry from Konami's later NES efforts). That's easily forgiven, though, because it's a very early NES release, and it more than makes up for this shortcoming with solid control, a nice variety of weapons, and both vertically and horizontally scrolling stages. Like I said earlier, get a friend to play with you... it's a riot just competing for the power-up bells ("Hey, that red one's mine!" "Oh, you mean the one I just shot?" "You idiot! Now it's yellow again! Maybe if you'd stay on your side I could get a better weapon before the end of the century..."), and when the two of you lock hands- yes, your ships have hands- you can emit a deadly wave beam which can annihilate even the bosses with one shot. If you like cute shooters, they don't come much cutier or shootier than this.

HALF ASS

"Revenge of the Nerd"

HI, WE'RE A MULTI-BILLION DOLLAR GLOBAL CONGLOMERATE, AND YOU'RE...

just one person

(that person being Bill Jasick)

After years of agonizing silence, it was wonderful to finally see *The Simpsons'* creator Matt Groening speak out about anything and everything in the February issue of *Wired*. The interview even featured a Bender comic that quickly erased any reservations I had about Groening's new series *Futurama*. Unfortunately, Matt had a brain fart in the middle of the discussion... when asked about recent pop culture trends, he generalized video games as "mirthless bashing" (mirthless? You mean like the last three seasons of *The Simpsons*?), but then heaps praise onto *Crash Bandicoot* (!?!), citing its similarities to classic cartoons. Look, Mr. Groening is entitled to his opinion- although he's so wrong it hurts- but isn't it a little unfair to demand the qualities of cartoons from an entirely different form of entertainment? Video games have their own unique appeal that's almost completely unreliant on the concept of humor... sure, some games benefit from it, but many do not; in fact, it's more of a distraction in Working Designs' RPGs than anything else. It's a pity that Matt Groening doesn't understand this, although judging from the *Simpsons* episode where Bart is urged to steal an especially violent game by Sonic, Mario, and Donkey Kong, it's hardly a surprise.

Yeesh! Commercials are driving me nuts! Like that one from a while back where an announcer informs me that I can be "just like Tiger Woods" if I get a sleeve of golf balls offered inside specially marked boxes of Wheaties. As if I needed another reason to eat Total... Look, when I want to be some pimply-faced quasi-athlete who grabs his ankles at the mere mention of an endorsement deal, I'll let you know. But my frustration with advertisements doesn't end at the breakfast table, no sir! How about those MCI/WorldCom spots starring Michael Jordan and a gaggle of bastardized Loony Toons? A note to the ex-Bulls superschill: you have billions of dollars in the bank. You can afford acting lessons. Then, of course, there's that scourge of evil sweeping the land we politely call televangelism. In the southwest, we're forced to listen to an idiot named Rod Parsely spew some sanctimonious nonsense about being "annointed with the power of the Spirit" every time we turn on our televisions. I'd like to annoint him, all right, but what I'd use wouldn't pass for holy water... Finally, we have those lovely ads for feminine hygiene products. If that washed-up supermodel Kim Alexis tells me about her yeast infections just ONE MORE TIME, I swear I'm gonna hot glue her vagina shut!

Don't get me wrong; I love the Internet, but what's with peoples' insatiable lust for cyberporn? Just run your favorite Internet Relay Chat program and type /list at the prompt... it'll come up with chat rooms ranging from #dragqueens to #hotbarnyardlove. I never even use the command because I get my Internet feed from the local library... the folks who work there would probably stuff me through the book drop if they saw the ten zillion sexually explicit chat rooms that pop up the second you hit enter. What's worse is all the junk E-mail I get for 1-900 lines... do the people that run these services just instantly assume that I'm a pathetic sex-crazed loser just because I have a Hotmail account? And if that doesn't take the cake (the bachelor party variety with the stripper inside), all this smut manages to light up my screen even when I'm searching for information on a totally unrelated topic. It doesn't matter what it is... look up space shuttles on Excite and you're likely to find one docking inside a woman's vagina! Try to find information about a retirement home and someone will invite you to play an on-line game of strip shuffleboard! I mean, good grief, where does it end? Not with video games, that's for damned sure. I was overjoyed to find a web page with a complete listing of Japanese Saturn releases... that is, until I hopped around the site a bit and found out that it was hosted by a gay advocacy group. Like, HUH?! Just when did the Saturn become the official game system of militant homosexuals? Maybe it has something to do with Cyclops from *Marvel Super Heroes vs. Street Fighter*, or the fact that there's a cartridge port near the back of the system... after all, the Saturn's games do improve when it gets RAM up the butt.



Having previously owned an NES and Super NES, I looked forward to Sony's arrival in the game console market. However, after owning a Playstation for a couple of years, it seems like it's a case of "meet the old boss, same as the new boss". Don't get me wrong; I'm glad I have a PS-X, but Sony seems to care as little about their customers as Sega or Nintendo.

One thing that immediately comes to mind is the "skipping" bug- a problem with which I have first-hand experience- and Sony's denial of and refusal to address the problem. My call to the customer service line yielded such helpful advice as "Don't use a third party controller", "Unplug the machine when not in use", etc.

The encryption technology in the Playstation that prevents you from playing import games is another annoyance, worsened by their "let's only approve games that showcase the Playstation's 3D capabilities" policy (although they have softened their stance a bit). And Sony's commitment to utilize the Playstation as a dedicated gaming platform and nothing else may have denied us innovative software, like a "History of Video Games" CD-ROM or who knows what else. With an installed user base of millions, I think Sony could take a gamble or two by now.

Their Playstation Underground promotion is a load of crap, basically *Nintendo Power* on CD-ROM. Companies have to pay \$10,000 to include their games on each edition of the disc, unless Sony feels they are "showcase titles" like *Final Fantasy VII* or *Crash Bandicoot*. Oh, Sony, could you please be just a little more stingy with your game demo discs?

And let's not forget the Yaroze, a chance for budding game designers to create software that nobody will ever see (a whole lot of good that does us!).

The icing on the cake would probably be my broken Playstation controller, the "official" one that was packed with my system.

I still think that Sony's Playstation is the best console of the two available (the Nintendo64 doesn't really count, because its cartridges cost as much as 1 1/2 Playstation games and its software library lacks variety). I just wish SCEA would try to make their customers feel more valued.

A Very Bieniek Interview



Did'ja ever wonder what made the great Video Games and Computer Entertainment tick? Or why Arnie Katz and company left the magazine shortly before it went under? Perhaps the decision to transform it into the tragically hip VideoGames still boggles your mind, or you can't help but wonder how its descendant, Tips & Tricks, managed to rise from the ashes of its failed predecessor to become the most popular strategy guide magazine on newsstands today. One man was there through the evolution of LFP's video game publications... I had the chance to ask him all of these questions, plus a few you may not have considered. Special thanks go to Chris Bieniek for editing the interview a bit to give it a more personal feel.

Jess Ragan: Please introduce yourself for the benefit of my less enlightened readers.

Chris Bieniek: Hello, Jess' less enlightened readers. I'm the Editor in Chief of *Tips & Tricks*, a monthly video-game tip and strategy magazine.

JR: Could you maybe mention what you were doing before editing T&T?

CB: Okay...uh, before that, I was Executive Editor of *VideoGames* magazine, Senior Editor of VG, before that, Associate Editor of *VideoGames & Computer Entertainment*, a Contributing Editor to VG&CE, and for a while I was Senior Editor of *TurboPlay* magazine.

JR: This question's pretty obvious: How'd you first get involved with video games? Was there any game in particular which first captured your imagination?

CB: I'm not gonna lie and say that I started with *Pong*; I think the first video game that I ever played was *Gunfight* or *Outlaw* or something, where you had two cowboys on the screen shooting at each other. That REALLY freaked me out. I was sitting in a restaurant with my parents, completely turned around in my chair, facing away from the table so I could watch people playing the game. I remember thinking, "You mean, you can actually CONTROL those guys on the TV?" The first home video game I ever played was the original *Odyssey* from Magnavox, which my dad borrowed from a friend for a couple of weeks. Later on, we got an *Astrocade* system, and I won an Atari VCS from a Cap'n Crunch contest, if you can believe that! I was totally obsessed with arcade games and Atari stuff, but I didn't have a lot of money at the time to support my hobby, so I kept tabs on the industry by picking up every video-game magazine I could get my hands on: *Electronic Games*, *Electronic Fun*, *Video Games*, *Videogaming Illustrated*, *Joystick*, and so on. Also, my dad worked in the audio-visual department of the University of Illinois, so he went to the Consumer Electronics Show every summer. He would go on the first day of the show, then he would let me take his badge so I could sneak in on the second day and check out all of the new video game stuff. I couldn't really talk to anybody because I was there under false pretenses; I think the badge identified me as an "Institutional Buyer." But I still got to play all the new games and grab a bunch of free magazines and literature; man, those shows were great back then. And I remember at some point, probably around 1983, it occurred to me that I was actually spending more money on video-game magazines than on games themselves. That was probably some kind of omen, but I didn't recognize it as such until years later.

JR: Your most celebrated accomplishment was contributing to the professional game magazine *VideoGames & Computer Entertainment*. I assume you were quite young when the first issue was published...how were you

able to convince editor Andy Eddy to print your reviews in what was essentially a magazine intended for mature readers?

CB: Hmm... I dunno what you mean by "quite young;" I think I was 24 when I wrote my first review for VG&CE. And I don't believe that the founders of VG&CE were targeting a specific age group; I think they were just trying to be mature and responsible in the way that they covered the industry, and because of the low-grade mentality of the competitors that cropped up around it, it just SEEMED like it was aimed at an older readership. I don't know if you're familiar with *A.N.A.L.O.G. Computing* magazine, which was an Atari computer magazine LFP published in the late '80s. *VideoGames and Computer Entertainment* was sort of a spin-off from that magazine; a lot of the people who worked on VG&CE - like Andy and Clayton Walnum - came from A.N.A.L.O.G., which had a pretty sophisticated readership. So I guess it was just natural that those guys would bring a little bit of that mentality to VG&CE when it started up. Anyway...there was a magazine called *Computer Play* that did some coverage of the NES, and they ran an ad that said they were looking for freelance contributors; they were soliciting reviews and articles. So I wrote up reviews of a couple of NES games and sent them in, thinking that I could make a little money, which I could use to buy more games, and the whole thing would kind of perpetuate itself, you know. I had no idea how these things were done...I never thought it would turn into a career! They eventually called me up and asked if I'd be interested in reviewing PC games, and I said that I was, but the truth was that I didn't have access to a decent PC; I was really only interested in console games. And while I was trying to figure out how to explain this to them, the first issue of VG&CE appeared at my local 7-11. I looked at the masthead, found Andy's name and wrote him a very polite letter explaining how I noticed that he had singlehandedly written most of the NES coverage in that first issue. I sent along one of the reviews that I had sent to *Computer Play*, but I also wanted to do something fresh, so I borrowed a fairly new game from a friend and wrote a review of that one as well. The next thing I knew, Andy sent me a contract to sign and said that VG&CE was going to print one of the reviews; he bought it right on the spot!

Years later, he did mention to me that the reason why he paid attention to my letter was because I had taken the time to format the reviews so carefully; I wrote them out to match the exact format of the reviews that I had seen in that first issue, and even included a floppy disk so they didn't even have to be typed in. You know, if anybody is reading this interview hoping to get some advice on how to get a job working for a video-game magazine, I should point out that there's NO WAY a scenario like this could ever happen again. I was totally in the right place at the right time; I mean, I'm sure it helped that I had a thorough knowledge of the game industry, and that I was able to construct coherent sentences. But I consider myself extremely lucky to have been given a chance to do this. I mean, look at it this way: I submitted those reviews in January of '89 and Andy contacted me about two weeks later. I waited and waited to see my name in print, and after a couple of months I was starting to wonder if maybe I had imagined the whole thing. I think it was...like, the June issue when it finally got printed. That game came out in December; it was called *Anticipation*. Now, when was the last time that you opened up a video-game magazine and read a review of a game that had already been on the shelves for about seven months? I guess they must have liked something about my writing; I really can't tell you why both *Computer Play* and VG&CE were interested in me right off the bat.

JR: I noticed that about VG&CE...even its other reviews were never especially current. It's a wonder Joyce Worley ever bothered with that news column of hers - it must have been seriously dated by the time each issue came out.

CB: Ahh, every print magazine has to deal with lead time. At least we were giving our guys some time to actually play the games before they wrote about them. I don't think it was too bad. And the news section was kind of a necessary evil; nowadays I find myself referring to the news sections in those older issues if I'm doing research.

JR: Name some memorable moments you had as a contributor to VG&CE.

CB: Wow... that's kind of a general question. I had a memorable moment practically every month when I got games sent to me for review. Before I moved to L.A. in '92, I was doing reviews as a freelancer living in Chicago; they would send me a game or two every month, and I would write about 'em. And of course, there were some REALLY AMAZING games that the

FedEx guy dropped off at my house, pre-release copies of incredible stuff like *Battletoads* and *Sonic the Hedgehog*. That's still the coolest thing about this job: the fact that you get to play the games before the rest of the world sees 'em. I practically fuckin' jumped out of my skin the day I got *Ninja Gaiden II*, man; I couldn't believe how lucky I was.

But if I had to point to one really special moment, it would actually be something that happened during the *VideoGames* era, not during the VG&CE period. I had written this feature article about Spider-Man, where I talked about all of the video games that Spider-Man has appeared in, and I did tons of research; it turned out pretty good. Anyway, in the article I mentioned the fact that the original *Spider-Man* game for the Game Boy played some music that was obviously a thinly-disguised version of the theme from the original *Spider-Man* TV show, the cartoon from the '60s. So a few months later, I got a phone call from an old guy who introduced himself as Bob Harris, the guy who WROTE the *Spider-Man* theme. I guess somebody showed him my article, and he wanted some information on the game and who the publisher was so he could sue them! And in the course of the conversation, he's trying to find out if I'm sure of what I wrote, so he says, "How do you know it was my theme? I mean, does it go, 'Spider-Man, Spider-Man, does whatever a spider can, spins a web, any size...'" etc. And I totally had one of those transcendental moments, you know; I was outside of myself, looking down and thinking, "I'm in my office in Beverly Hills...I play video games for a living...I work for Larry Flynt...the guy who wrote the *Spider-Man* theme is on the phone...and he's SINGING it to me!" That's when it really dawned on me that my life had totally changed, that I had a pretty unusual career.

JR: Were you worried about the future of VG&CE when Arnie Katz, Joyce Worley and Bill Kunkel left the magazine to resurrect *Electronic Games*? It seems like more than a coincidence that Katz and company left *VideoGames* & *Computer Entertainment* a year before it became *VideoGames*.

CB: Not at all; in fact, I'm glad you asked that question because I'd like to clear up a VERY common misconception about the way VG&CE was produced. With all due respect - and I do have tons of respect for them, because they INVENTED the job that I have today - Arnie, Joyce and Bill were freelance contributors who had very little to do with the editorial direction of VG&CE. They lived in Las Vegas and simply sent in their articles each month, just as I had done when I was living in Chicago. To give you an idea of how detached they were from the magazine's day-to-day activity: During their tenure with VG&CE, I attended two different Consumer Electronics Shows as a representative of the magazine. I walked the show floor with Andy and Mike Davila the entire time, and I never even SAW Arnie, Joyce or Bill; they seemed to be running a completely independent operation. In fact, I didn't even get to meet Arnie or Joyce in person until August of 1998.

JR: That surprises me. Joyce was nothing if not consistent with her news column. I can't think of an issue of VG&CE that didn't have one. Now, Arnie and Bill on the other hand...it's not too hard to believe that they were just contributors. The Arnster did a lot of computer reviews and a monthly editorial but never anything that was bolted into the framework of the magazine. And Bill...well, he was just there.

CB: Well, let me back up a little. I don't mean to trivialize their contributions to VG&CE, because they brought instant credibility to the magazine at launch. I mean, Bill's the Game Doctor, for crying out loud...everybody read that column! And the "Inside Gaming" column did suck after Arnie stopped doing it; that was one of the biggest differences that resulted from their departure. It's just that over the years I've talked to SO many people who always thought that they were running the show, and that just wasn't the case. Anyway, not long after I came on board, there was talk of replacing them by hiring a full-time computer entertainment editor. I guess the powers-that-be wanted more control over the parts of the magazine that they were responsible for, and plans were being drawn up to bring all of the computer game coverage back in-house. So when the three of them announced that they were going to re-launch *Electronic Games*...well, it was a perfectly amicable split, and I personally believed that VG&CE could be stronger because we would have all of the editors in the same office. I guess that was around the time that the sales started to drop off...but the short answer to your original question is "no," because I didn't believe that there was going to be any change in the quality of the magazine.

JR: When LFP attempted to revive VG&CE by turning it into a more

mainstream, "hip" publication, many of the magazine's editors were replaced with relatively inexperienced writers like Chris Gore and Betty Hallock. Did you resent that Chris Gore was chosen as the head editor of *VideoGames* when Clayton Walnut, Howard H. Wen and yourself had been with the publication since its inception in 1988?

CB: No, but if anybody had anything to complain about, it would have been Mike Davila, because he was second-in-command when Andy left. I guess you're not aware of the fact that there were only three of us on the in-house editorial staff at the time. The rest of those guys were all freelancers: Howard and Brent Walker lived in Texas, Josh Mandel lived in Northern California and Clay lived in Connecticut.

JR: Do you keep in touch with any of your old acquaintances from VG&CE or *VideoGames*?

CB: Unfortunately, a lot of the VG&CE guys were shut out when the magazine became VG; Josh, in particular, was really offended by the changes in the magazine. In fact, he wrote a very long, pointed letter explaining how misguided he thought the "new" *VideoGames* was, and backed up his opinions with all kinds of marketing research data and case histories. I wish I had a copy of that somewhere, because it was brilliant; he basically predicted the downfall of *VideoGames* back in 1993! I still talk to Mike Davila all the time; in fact, both he and Andy are now working at a trade magazine called *GameWeek*. And I run into Donn Nauert every once in a while; he's a producer over at THQ.

JR: Here's a sensitive one. There's a rumor that Chris Gore burst into Betty Hallock's office and demanded that she revise a negative review of a game for the Atari Jaguar. At the time, the Jaguar was heavily advertised in *VideoGames*. Is there any truth to this bit of folklore, and were there other, similar incidents that occurred while you were assistant editor at the magazine?

CB: (Sigh)...That sounds somewhat inaccurate, if only because there was no reason for anyone to "burst into" anyone else's office when one could just as easily open up a layout document and change the text, or have the art director change the ratings behind everybody else's back. I do remember at least one incident where a number was changed; in fact, at one point Betty and I started to use pseudonyms for a couple of reviews because we were being forced to crap them out so quickly that there was no way the games were getting fair treatment. There was a lot of horrible shit going on at *VideoGames* during its last few years; I'll say that.

JR: Sorry if I opened up any old wounds! I don't remember your using any pseudonyms. Of course, that was probably the point.

CB: Yeah, I hope it wasn't real obvious! The one I remember most vividly was a game called *Golf Magazine Presents 36 Great Holes Starring Fred Couples* for the 32X; I was forced to pull that review out of my butt in about 45 minutes. I played the game for maybe 15 minutes, then I just sat down at the keyboard and started going on and on about "Gee, isn't that the longest game title you've ever heard in your life?" and how every game system has to have a golf game, blah blah blah, until I filled up enough space. And I didn't want my name on any of that shit; it was bad enough that my name was up there on the masthead as "Executive Editor" when I was practically powerless.

You know, I'm not the last great bastion of journalistic integrity or anything, but I do try to be fair, to be entertaining and informative...it's like, if your magazine costs five bucks, it had better be WORTH five bucks. Now, *Tips & Tricks* ain't perfect, but I believe there's more than five bucks worth of stuff in every issue; we try to make sure of that. But some of those issues of *VideoGames*, I wouldn't wipe my ass with 'em.

JR: You'd left *VideoGames* shortly before it was acquired and shut down by Ziff-Davis to work on *Tips & Tricks*. How were you able to turn this niche publication into such a remarkable success? After all, previous attempts at tips magazines didn't exactly fly off newsstand shelves...

CB: Well, I had been doing the tips sections in *VideoGames* since Donn left the magazine in 1992, and I found that I had a knack for it. I'm pretty good at finding secrets in games, but what's more important is that I'm very good at EXPLAINING how to do the tricks and codes. The information in *Tips & Tricks* is extremely reliable, due to a number of factors that I'd rather not go into here. And I think that there's a need for a video-game tips magazine.

I'm not sure which "previous attempts" you're referring to, because the only other one I know of was *S.W.A.T. Pro*, which probably failed because it consisted almost entirely of information that had already appeared (or was appearing concurrently) in *GamePro*.

JR: Former contributor Betty Hallock became something of a sex symbol among hopeful *Tips & Tricks* readers before she left the magazine to pursue a career in the news media. Did Ms. Hallock's unexpected fame ever make you or her nervous? Remember, T&T is a Larry Flynt publication, and the man does get ideas...

CB: Eh...I don't think we ever got to the point where we were really trying to position Betty as a "sex symbol." Some of the readers may have chosen to think of her that way, but it only manifested itself in the form of a few wacky letters every month. Don't get me wrong; she did get a lot of really nice, normal mail from a lot of people who admired her - which in itself is unusual, because most of the people in this business get very little feedback unless they get up on the Internet or something and toot their own horns. But the lunatics who wrote in asking for nude centerfolds and stuff seemed to be really hung up on nothing more than the idea of a GIRL who likes to play video games, as if that was the idea of their perfect mate. And I hate to burst bubbles, but Betty wasn't really a video-game player!

I remember one promotion where we tossed around the idea of making up some 8x10" glossy photos and having her autograph them, but it wasn't something she was comfortable with, so it never happened. And when she started that monthly column in the back of the magazine, we were obviously thinking of calling it "The Betty Page," but she didn't like that idea, either. You know, for somebody who walked around the office in platform shoes with retractable roller skates built into them, she was pretty low-key.

I'll tell you about another "female video-game player," since you're interested in VG&CE trivia: If you look at some older issues of the mag, you'll find a bunch of reviews that were written by somebody named "Christie Hewlett." Well, I found out years later that this was a pseudonym used by one of the regular VG&CE reviewers; I guess he wanted to try reviewing games in a "feminine voice." No, I'm not making this up!

JR: *Tips & Tricks* has hired more video game fanzine editors than any other publication. What do fan-ed's bring to T&T?

CB: Lots of things. Intelligence...common sense...industry knowledge...When I was doing fanzine reviews for *VideoGames*, I would sit there every month and marvel over the fact that many of the fanzine editors were doing better work than a lot of the people who worked for "professional" video-game magazines. In a lot of cases, they were better writers, they had a better sense of the history of the industry, they just had a better grasp of what people want to read about. Plus, I think the nature of the term "fan" suggests someone who really has a hell of a lot of enthusiasm for the subject matter, you know? That's something you gotta have. We had a couple of ex-fanzine editors freelancing for *VideoGames* who were among our best writers, so *Tips & Tricks* naturally tapped into that talent pool as well.

JR: I guess I wasn't one of those cases, huh?

CB: Well, Jess, you've got this funny habit of pissing off people who I happen to have a lot of respect for! Tommy Tallarico, Tyrone Rodriguez, Joe Santulli...I mean, who's next?

JR: Got any suggestions? Heh, heh... Seriously, though, I guess it doesn't really matter. The fanzine I was editing at the time was pretty crappy, so it's understandable that *VideoGames* wasn't interested in me. Still, though, whose idea was it to hire DAVID HUNT as a contributor to *Tips & Tricks*? His fanzine was one of the few that was actually WORSE than *Project: Ignition*. Not that I'm bitter.

CB: He was a friend of Tyrone's. We gave him a shot because he was local; he was able to physically come into the office and work on our Neo-Geo machine, for example.

JR: What direction do you think video games are taking? Is the trend toward 3-D graphics and gameplay a positive one, or have companies turned the concept of full-immersion gaming into a cheap gimmick?

CB: Well, I can understand the interest in game environments that exist in 3-D space, but...ahh...I can't say that the trend is a positive one because -

with the exception of the Virtual Boy and a couple of weird experiments - it's still a two-dimensional medium. I love the exploration aspects of games like *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Mega Man Legends*, but when it comes time for my character to jump on a platform, I have to look at the damn shadow to figure out where the hell he really is. You can perceive depth in a lot of different ways; I mean, there are a lot of visual cues that kind of roughly suggest the relative distances of certain objects. But unless your eyes are receiving two separate images, the way they do in everyday life, your brain just isn't getting enough information to really pinpoint the location of an object or surface in 3-D space.

I guess what I'm trying to say is that there's something fundamentally flawed about a lot of polygonal video games. I think it takes a lot of time and effort to try to correct some of the inherent problems; like, camera positioning being the really obvious one. I honestly don't know if it's possible to do a better job with camera placement than Nintendo did with Mario 64, yet I hear people complain about the camera in that game all the time. And no, I wouldn't call 3-D gaming a "cheap gimmick," but I do think it's unfortunate that companies like Sony seem to frown on 2-D games.

JR: Never thought of it that way. Actually, I always felt that polygons do a much better job of portraying 3-D than other methods. Have you seen the *Dragonball Z Legends* game for the Saturn?

CB: No.

JR: The designers tried to merge 2-D sprites with 3-D backgrounds, resulting in an instant headache for the player.

CB: Hmm...I've seen some games where that works, but I guess it's kind of significant that I can't think of one off the top of my head.

JR: The Sega Saturn's failure came as a surprise to many gamers. Do you feel that the professional game magazine circuit should bear some responsibility for the Saturn's demise, and is Dreamcast's future any brighter than its predecessor's?

CB: In my personal opinion, no, and no.

JR: You're entitled to that opinion, but I disagree with the first answer. Come on, *VideoGames* published an article entitled "Ten Reasons Why the PlayStation Is the System To Beat", and that's not sinking a knife into the Saturn's heart before it was even released!

CB: Oh, no...not that thing, that piece of crap! Let me tell you about that so-called "article." It appeared in the very last issue of *VideoGames* that I worked on as Executive Editor, and one of my last official acts in that position was to do a final edit on all of the finished pages that were being shipped out. So this THING, this total propaganda piece, comes across my desk, and as usual, I had about a half-hour to do surgery on it, to rewrite it into something legible. I opened up the document on my Mac, and it was already totally laid out; all of the pictures were on the page and everything, supposedly ready to go. Ohhh, man...I wish I had a copy of the original document; it was filled with bold-faced statements about how the PlayStation was gonna destroy the competition, just totally throwing the idea of unbiased journalism out the window. And it was way too late for me to write the whole thing over again from scratch, so I was forced to trim it up quickly and patch in some text here and there. Like, there was a headline that proclaimed, "THE BEST 32-BIT SYSTEM," or something similar, so I threw a question mark at the end of it; shit like that. I had written an article on the Neo-Geo CD for that same issue, and I tried to keep everything in context; you know, it was obvious that it wasn't going to be a mass-market item like the PlayStation or Saturn, but I presented the information appropriately. I thought it was pretty fair. But that PlayStation feature was a perfect example of everything that went wrong with *VideoGames*.

Anyway, to get back to your original question: A lot of people like to jump to conclusions about certain magazines showing bias toward one system or another. And while I do believe that does happen, there are times when trying to be comprehensive can make it seem like you're favoring certain systems. You know, *Tips & Tricks* doesn't do reviews, so we don't get criticized for our opinions. But if we devote 40 pages to the PlayStation and only 10 to the Saturn, certain Saturn fanatics go nuts and accuse us of bias - never mind the fact that there were only two new games for the Saturn that month (versus 25 for the PlayStation) and that less than a fourth of our readers own a Saturn (versus more than half owning a PlayStation).

It's just a reflection of what's currently going on in the marketplace.

I personally don't believe that the magazines are powerful enough to make or break a game system, anyway. I mean, how many people play video games in the U.S.? Isn't it, like, 50 million? 100 million? Yet no American game magazine has been able to reach more than a half-million or so of those people, many of whom have been burned by magazine reviews so frequently that they take ALL of the information they read with a grain of salt. Oh, and don't forget that the Saturn did come out before the PlayStation here; in fact, it was already on sale for a few months before that fucked-up PlayStation article was printed.

JR: All true, but you forget the ripple effect that video game magazines have. Little Johnny buys a copy of EGM, then tells his friends about all the "great new stuff" that's coming out, and his friends do the same. I tend to think that the game magazines drive the industry...let's face it, Lara Croft is a pretty generic, and not especially sexy, character. I honestly don't think that *Tomb Raider* would have been a success if the professional magazine circuit hadn't made such a big deal out of Lara's, er, silicone warriors. It was a fine game that could have stood on its own merit, but merit alone didn't sell many copies of *Gunstar Heroes*.

CB: I disagree. I'll admit that it helps sales when a game gets exposure; that's obvious. But no American game magazine has the ability to change your opinion about a product, especially when there are so many different ways for you to go and check out the product for yourself and draw your own conclusions about it. And I think you're in the minority on the Lara Croft issue; I think most of the people who played *Tomb Raider* found her to be much more than a "pretty generic...not especially sexy character." Plus, she showed up on a lot more than just game magazine covers, so the character was seen by a lot of people who aren't hardcore video game players...and that's ALWAYS gonna help sales.

I'm with you on the subject of *Gunstar Heroes*; incredible game, probably would have sold more copies if the magazines had given it more exposure...and as you may know, Sega decided not to put any kind of promotional effort behind that game, so none of the magazines even got a review copy of it. But that's kind of a different topic; your original question was about the Saturn, which WAS promoted by Sega and DID get its share of exposure from the various game magazines. Blechh...you've really got me up on a soapbox, here. Quick, change the subject!

JR: OK...A military experiment goes horribly awry, flooding the country with radiation. Men everywhere are robbed of their sex drives as the nation's supply of Viagra is quickly exhausted. Desperate to stay financially solvent, Larry Flynt begs you to create the "ultimate video game magazine," and this time, he really means it! What would you do to make this perfect game magazine a reality?

CB: Heh...well, as ridiculous as that hypothetical scenario may sound, the most absurd part is the idea that he would start up yet another video game magazine to make up for that lost income.

I don't even know if I could answer this question; the business of publishing a video game magazine is a pretty screwed-up one. The video-game industry may be huge in terms of dollars and cents, but it's a lot younger than the movie industry or the record industry, for example. And because of the inexperience of a lot of important people-at the magazines and at the game companies-there have been a lot of bad precedents set that are going to take a long time to straighten out. I honestly don't have any interest in doing anything but *Tips & Tricks* right now, anyway; there are a lot of things I'd like to see happen with T&T that will keep it on a growth pattern for a couple more years, easy. Plus, there are too many magazines on the market already... another one isn't going to have much impact no matter who you get to do it or how much money you put into it.

JR: What the heck happened to *Tips & Tricks*' Arcade Brigade comic? Nikos Constant was building to an important plot point, and all of a sudden, the comic (and Nikos) disappears! Was there any particular reason why?

CB: Nikos had a lot of freelance projects going on at the time, and I guess *Tips & Tricks* just fell too far from the top of his priority list. And we really had no feedback that would have led us to believe that the comic was something that people would miss, so we just dropped it.

JR: I thought it would be cool if, after defeating Jim, Chris and Tyrone somehow met up with the characters from *VideoGames & Computer*

Entertainment's comic Crash and Boom.

CB: <Gaak!> Now THAT'S something that would not have registered with too many readers; I can't believe you remember that awful thing. I do think a recurring comic strip is a good idea, and it's something I'd like to bring back some day, but the guy who was my first choice to do it was not willing to get involved.

Before we started up the Arcade Brigade strip, I called up John Holmstrom and asked him if he'd be interested in doing a comic strip for us. I don't know if you ever heard of him; he's sort of a legendary underground comic artist/magazine editor. He worked on the original *Video Games* magazine from the early '80s, and he had this fantastic video-game review column/cartoon thing in Heavy Metal back in '82 or so. He would review arcade games, and he also did these real-life strips in which he would sit down and play video games with people like Joey Ramone or Lemmy from *Motorhead* and show how they reacted to games like *Demon Attack*. It took me about a month and a half to track down his phone number; I think he's the editor of *High Times* or something now. Anyway, he seemed pleased that someone remembered his connection to the video game industry, but he said that he doesn't do comic stuff anymore, which was kind of sad for me to hear. He was an influence on my career in a way; he was known for his drawing style, but his game reviews had a lot of weird insight. Like, he once did a review of *Robotron: 2084* in which he noted that the game has no real ending, so the "last human family" always dies...but, he said, that was a good thing, because if they survived, the inbreeding that would be necessary to repopulate the Earth would probably result in a race of "morons, cretins and imbeciles." It was super-funny shit. Sorry, I went off on another tangent there.

JR: You don't get this opportunity in *Tips & Tricks*, so I thought I'd give you the chance to smash, trash and totally ravage the games you've hated most in the last two years.

CB: Oh, you're not gonna get me with that one! Actually...uh, this might sound like a cop-out, but I can usually find some merit in just about any video game. Even *Fantastic Four*, which a lot of people single out as THE worst PlayStation game...well, I had fun playing that game, it was interesting. Or *Bubsy 3-D*; same thing. You know, I don't write reviews any more, but I figure it's important for me as a video-game magazine editor to take a fresh look at every piece of software that comes into the office...to give 'em a fair shake and not be jaded 'cause I'm surrounded by video games all day long. Like, if I was a kid who got *Fantastic Four* for my birthday, and if *Fantastic Four* was the only game I owned...man, I'd be playing the living shit out of that game, I'd be stoked on *Fantastic Four*, you know what I mean? I'd be telling my friends all about it at school and sitting up all night thinking about how to beat the Mole Man. And I think that kid's opinion is just as valid as the opinions of the "journalists" who get a bunch of games sent to them every day for free. Maybe even more so. Maybe that kid has been delivering newspapers for a year just to save up the money to buy *Bubsy 3-D*...I figure that gives him the right to say, "I like this game; I enjoy playing this game." 'Cause he earned that right. Who am I to take that away from him? You know, I've been working in this business for a pretty long time; ten years since I wrote that *Anticipation* review. So maybe I do have the right to say, "This game sucks," or "Don't buy that game." But I don't do that; I never really did.

There's a really interesting trend going on in Japan right now; there are a lot of video-game players who enjoy collecting bad video games, especially on CD systems like the PlayStation and Saturn. They call them "Kusoge," which basically means "shit games." Now that's a fad that I can get into. I mean, how cool is that? For me, it's fun to sit down with a game like that and look for redeeming features; it's like an additional challenge on top of the challenge of beating the game or getting a high score or whatever.

JR: Is there anything you would have done differently as a contributor to *VideoGames & Computer Entertainment*, or as the editor of *VideoGames* and *Tips & Tricks*?

CB: That's an interesting question...no, not really. There are some things I probably should have done sooner, but I'm a patient person. And there are a lot of things I would LIKE to have done, especially during that horrible *VideoGames* period - like killing that butt-kissing PlayStation article! Unfortunately, it was not really within my power to do them. But I'm comfortable with that. History will vindicate me.

CUTLINE

To the untrained eye, this may look like a shameless copy of Betty's Back Page from the earlier issues of Tips & Tricks, but this is a column for the meat and potatoes man! No flowers and frills here... I'm going to introduce you to many munchies that'll make the food critics at GQ look like the pretentious little wussy boys they are!

Eh... who am I kidding? I might as well strap on the wig and Hello Kitty backpack and call myself Marcia Armon! Anyway, you should already know what's eating me... I may as well fill you in on what I've been sinking my own teeth into lately.

After visiting the Taco Bells in Michigan who knows how many times, I was really pumped about trying some real Mexican food once I moved to Arizona. Well, hombres, now that I've had a taste of the genuine article, I've got to tell you that I wasn't too impressed. The tamales were especially disillusioning... I thought they'd be even meatier than the ones Hormel sells in the can, but they're more like burritos wrapped in a soggy corn crust. There are several ways to prepare tamales, but I've hated them all... perhaps the worst of the bunch was a shredded chicken number loaded with green olives (eech). You can only imagine my surprise upon discovering these were unpitted olives... I was just a swallow away from calling Dr. Heimlich!

Wait... it gets worse. One day, while strolling through a supermarket geared especially to the Latino market, I found next to the Twinkies and Nutty Bars a rather unappetizing snack... two dried up pieces of toast adhered together with a splash of cream. I can't imagine WHY anyone would want to eat this, much less consider it a dessert, but eh, whatever. Just slightly less puzzling is palenta, described to me as the Mexican equivalent of southern grits. This has a slightly cheesy flavor, but as much as I like cheese, I just couldn't get into this. Moreover, it has a pretty scary smell which intensifies if you leave it out for a while.

The food isn't the only thing that's weird in Mexico! Just look at horchata, a very sweet (but not especially enjoyable) drink derived from the liquid of pressed rice. Actually, I'm not sure how they make this strange brew, but one thing's for sure... there was no way I was going to finish the monster-sized glass I was served at a local Mexican eatery. On the other side of the peso, champorella - a spiced cocoa best served at near-volcanic temperature - is wonderful, and a soothing capper to a stressful day. Just don't drink it while operating heavy machinery...

I'm quite certain my appreciation of champorella stems from an acute addiction to chocolate. I grew quite fond of cappuccino for about a year... I don't drink it now, but it was practically a life-saver on the long trip from Michigan to Arizona. My opinion of the hypercaffienated, super-sweet coffee beverage has gone from "quick, pour it into my IV!" to "Eh, whatever" after making myself sick from drinking a cap made milkshake-thick with over a dozen creamers. A word to the wise: be careful when you mix those flavored creamers into your coffee... they may seem tasty at first, but all that soy milk and sugar can really do a number on your stomach!

That brings me to the wonderful world of confections. I as a general rule love M&Ms, but the appeal to the new crispy variety (in the ugly blue bag) is lost on me. Frankly, Whoppers are better, and I'm pretty

indifferent to those as it is. Save your scratch for Mounds, the Peter Paul creation which brilliantly combines pillowy coconut with flavorful dark chocolate. Almond Joys are OK too, I guess, but the nuts are a bit of a distraction, and the milk chocolate lacks the depth of its non-dairy counterpart. Not that milk chocolate is a bad thing - it's in some of my favorite candy bars, including Kit Kats, Snickers, and Reese's Peanut Butter Cups - but it just seems so bland when paired with something as exotic as coconut.

For more substantial fare, I turn to the Velvet Elvis, a novelty restaurant in Palagonia which, as the name suggests, is decorated with ultra-tacky paintings of the 60's rock sensation. Part pizza parlor and part trendy yuppie hangout, the Velve serves everything from calzones to organic root beer (I'm not a fan of this... it's very foamy and has a repellent honey flavor) to fresh-squeezed juices. Its main attraction, of course, is the pizza... the slices are huge, roughly twice the size of the national chains, and are stone-fired for a taste that adds a southwestern flair to the popular Italian entree.

Believe it or not, sushi is pretty tasty, too. I had the chance to try some tuna rolls at Sakura (!), a Japanese bar just across the street from Golf 'n Stuff. Contrary to what you may think, the raw tuna has a very mild taste, and is nicely accented by the rice and nori (a leathery seaweed wrap) that envelopes it. Further enhancing the flavor is the tag-team combination of pickled ginger (sweet, with just the right amount of zest) and wabashi, an incredibly strong green horseradish which, when used in moderation, adds a nice kick to the otherwise delicate rolls. My only complaint is that sushi is more of a between meal snack than a complete meal... the servings are tiny and VERY expensive. It'll take at least \$20 worth of food to get the average diner anywhere close to full, not including the rounds of sake they'll no doubt slam over the course of the evening.

What's for dessert? I'd tend to go with a Choco Taco... the price is pretty steep, but hey, you get an entire sundae in that little silver foil package. Best of all, it's greasy, just like a real taco! I'm also partial to the Klondike line of products. The Big Bear sandwich dwarfs its competition (in both price and size, sadly), and the classic Klondike bars - a small block of ice cream smothered in chocolate - are always a pleasure to eat. If only the same could be said for Ben & Jerry's Peace Pops... I was sorely disappointed with these overhyped, overpriced, and overly gritty frozen desserts. For the same price, you could get an actual ice cream cone - maybe even a double! - and not contribute to the doobie funds of some half-baked hippie idealists in Vermont.

Speaking of gateway drugs, I do imbibe a bit of alcohol from time to time... not very much, because it seems to have a more pronounced effect on me than my drinking buddies (mostly my cousin and his friends). They've told me time and again that beer is an acquired taste, but to be perfectly honest, I don't think I could even develop a tolerance to it. I much prefer Zima, a citrus flavored beverage that's great with lemon juice and a salsito (a salted prune... I guess not all Mexican food is lousy!). Mixers are pretty cool, too, although I can't stand Bloody Marys... the combination of Worstershire Sauce, celery salt, and tomato juice is more toxic than intoxicating. Unless you want to stay up all night doubled over in excruciating pain, I'd steer clear of pretty much anything with vodka in it (that includes screwdrivers).

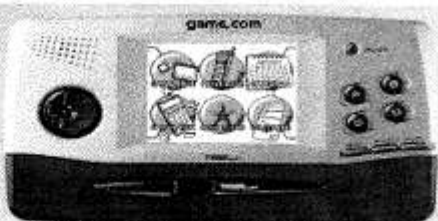


SAKURA

TEPPAN STEAK & SEAFOOD

We asked several fanzine editors...

Why Do YOU Own A



game.com?

"That thing has saved me a fortune on Ex-Lax... I just plug in a game and awaaay I go!"
Jess Ragan

"My collection of soon-to-be-defunct game systems just isn't complete without one."
Russ Perry, Jr.

"Well, SOMEONE has to keep Tiger in business!"
Rick Florey

"I'm conducting an experiment for the local college: we're gauging the effects of fun deprivation on a test group of students."
Ben Leatherman

"What?! This is a GAME.COM!? Dammit, Mom, I wanted a Game Boy! Game Boy!!"
Chris Kohler

"Yo, man, that shit is phat! If be da bomb! It to-tally fuckeeng rulz! It-" **<THUMP>**
Corey You, knocked unconscious with a slap-jack

"It makes the perfect April Fool's Day gag gift!"
Al Riccitelli, Jr.

"Someone told you I had a game.com?! That's a disgusting lie! I'm calling my lawyers! Get that damned microphone out of my face!"
Brian Pacula

"The quality software! I can't wait for *Gun.Smoke*, *Rug.Rats*, and *Tomb..Raider!*"
Greg Wilcox

"The frame rate reminds me of those films Charlie Chaplin used to do in the 1930's."
Matt Leone

"Zzz..."
Alan Lanoie, after playing *Henry* for 5 minutes

"I couldn't resist... the damned sales clerk taped a picture of Claire Danes to the screen! Oh, my sweet, sweet Claire..."
Eric Longdin

"It's my link to the internet. Er, well, sort of..."
Pat Reynolds

(Editor's Note: No, these aren't real quotes. And none of us own a game.com, except Russ, who got one for his birthday and was too polite to return it.)



Wrap It Up... I'll Take It

*Just When You Thought
It Couldn't Get Any Easier...*

This is incredibly juvenile, I know, but I just couldn't resist (c'mon, admit it... neither could you!). Above is an actual wrapper from a roll of toilet paper. Note the startlingly familiar logo just below the Envision trade name. Apparently, the folks at Oyster Bay were so used to getting crapped on by the critics that they got into the right business for it.

Fox's Hound Joins The Chase...

Seems that game collectors aren't the only ones searching in vain for *Chase the Chuckwagon*. In a recent episode of the new Fox television series *Family Guy*, a sarcastic, species-conflicted dog named Brian cuts a conversation with his owner short when he spots a tiny horse-drawn wagon zipping by him. He runs into the kitchen just in time to see the wagon disappear into the cupboard, where he finds a bag of kibble. It's obviously a reference to the dog food and not the video game, but it still brought back memories of the rare 2600 release (I used to own two of these, believe it or not!).

Shocking, Isn't It?

Compare them to adult novelties all you like, folks... I still love Nintendo and Sony's bio-feedback enhanced controllers. The new joypads really do add a new level of realism to games like *Metal Gear Solid* and *Brave Fencer Musashi*. I've even heard that the Color GameBoy version of *Top Gear* includes a Rumble Pak-like device that shakes the entire system in your hands when you hit the edges of the road or other cars! Sign me up for that!

Is Experience Really The Best Teacher?

After pondering the idea for a while, I've come to the conclusion that the experience point system in most RPGs is, well, dumb. Maybe this has already been tried, but shouldn't your party have different XP levels for different types of monsters? After all, the knowledge you've gained from killing slimes isn't going to help you much against the snarling displacer beasts hiding in the shadows of the next dungeon.

I thought about putting my usual jumble of rants and raves here, but since that's already been covered in the return of Half-Ass, I felt I should get this off my chest.

Y'know, it's odd... I thought that getting a Playstation would lessen my overwhelming Saturn bias, but now I hate Sony more than ever. I don't know about you, but I rather resent being FORCED to own a system I don't like just to continue enjoying a hobby I've loved for nearly twenty years. Sure, Nintendo had its own monopoly in the 80's, but they've been a major player in the industry for decades, and have an unparalleled knack for customer satisfaction. Meanwhile, Sony doesn't seem to give a damn's damn about Playstation owners, since the system is but a small (albeit very profitable) part of the electronics giant's empire.

I could write an entire fanzine about the flimsy first run of Playstation consoles, but that's old news... let's discuss Sony's pathetic customer (dis)serve hotline instead. It's a good thing these calls are monitored and recorded for the benefit of trainees, because the guy I wound up with could teach them volumes about how NOT to treat customers. Put succinctly, he was the biggest douchebag in the history of telecommunication. His smug yet lifeless voice scraped at my brain like a rusty hook, and he was armed with some of the most ridiculous, straight-from-a-Sony-press-release rhetoric I've ever heard. Obviously, the rep was hired as a mouthpiece for Sony, but even with this in mind, the propaganda he was spewing was completely beyond my realm of tolerance. Just listen to this:

"I've heard that Sony has a policy against 2D games."

(said with a distinct ring of indignation) "Eh... what?"

"Well, that's what all the professional game magazines say."

"Oh, I guess that's why the Playstation has some of the best Capcom fighting games ever made."

"Not on the Playstation! I mean, they're ON the Playstation, but the Saturn versions of those games are much better."

"Well, the Saturn is dead now, so that's a moot point."

"Not really... the people who want the best versions of the games will get a Saturn to play them."

"Next question."

He then went on to claim that Capcom was the one who decided not to release the Capcom Collection series in the United States (so much for "the buck stops here"...), and that it would be ridiculous for Sony to have a policy against 2D games, which we all know is bullshit because every major game magazine under the sun has made statements to the contrary. This brings me to my next and perhaps most important point: people complained bitterly about Nintendo's policies against violent and sexual content, but this hardly compares to Sony's almost draconian stance against games which they feel do not exploit the Playstation's "advanced" hardware. Hey, assholes, I've got news for you... your system's meager 33MHz clock speed has been eclipsed many times over by not only the Nintendo64 but by a vast array of Intel and Apple computers as well. Besides, what right do you have to dictate what we can and cannot play? Nintendo and (to a lesser extent) Sega never passed up a chance to offer its users creative games even if they didn't tap the full potential of their respective systems. All we get from Sony is the same old garbage... endless sequels to *Tomb Rider* and *Crash Bandicoot*. And damn it, I don't care HOW many dimensions these games are presented in... that just doesn't hide the fact that they're shamelessly derivative of *Prince of Persia* and *Super Mario Bros.*, two games Sony wouldn't touch with a ten foot pole.

It's a crime that a company which knows so little about video games and is so indifferent to its customers is currently a leader in this industry. It's even worse that gamers are practically forced to own a Playstation, and STILL aren't given the titles they want when Sony breaks their spirits and drags them to the dark side. It's time to end this cycle of oppression... speak out when SCEA refuses to localize an inventive new Japanese title. Buy imports to spite them when they deny worthy games a chance for success in the United States (and forget about modding your system! You can get a universal convertor with a host of other features from www.psxmodchips.com). And most importantly, diversify the market by purchasing other game systems. There's nothing more damaging to a creatively driven industry like video games than a monopoly... if Sony is allowed to keep a death grip on their licensees and customers, they run the very real risk of strangling our hobby to death.

Arcade Squeezins

obvious attempt to cash in on the success of a Japanese game show named *Ira Ira Bou*, in which players must guide a long stick through an electrically charged maze. The concept is essentially the same here, but players are given a trackball to lead their "Fright Saber" through a series of cunning labyrinths. If they brush even slightly against the sides of the playfield on their way to the goal, both they and their onscreen personas get the shock of their lives! I'm not going to give away the nasty little surprise this game has in store for clumsier players, but I will say this: there's a heart condition warning after the title screen, and it's there for a reason.

Riddle me this... is this the beginning of Arcade Squeezins, or just a continuation of the feature inside the issue? It could work either way, depending on whether or not you read the issue from front to back...

I was happily surprised by Atari Games' decision to release a sequel to *Gauntlet*, but I'm not sure what to think of the end result. Some older games work well in a revamped 3D environment, but others don't... it's hard to place *Gauntlet Legends* in either category. The game's new look adds a whole new level of realism and immersion to the arcade classic, but it also makes close-quarters fighting—practically a requirement to survive in most situations—an imprecise and frustrating chore. Like the original, *Legends* just isn't as fun without a horde of players fending off the unending legions of monsters... it makes the battles less of an annoyance, and also lends the game that Dungeons and Dragons™ brand of camaraderie and teamwork that so many electronic RPGs lack.

Finding the peculiar Neo-Geo release *The Irritating Maze* convinced me that SNK finally vowed to stop leeching ideas from other companies. No such luck, I'm afraid. As it turns out, *Maze* is an

Of course, SNK's aging arcade jukebox still gets more than its fair share of fighting games, and I regret to say that they've squeezed every drop of inspiration out of the Neo-Geo's flagship series, *The King of Fighters*. The '98 revision, subtitled *The Slugfest*, could very easily have been renamed *King of Fighters Quintology*, as it's essentially a rerelease of KOFs '96 and '97 with a handful of goofy characters from the series' first two outings. A note to SNK... the Neo-Geo isn't getting any younger, and the weak showing of *Samurai Shodown 64* proves that your newest system desperately needs your full attention. Don't you think maybe you should give the Neo a proper send-off with one last, incredible tourney fighter that combines the solid gameplay of *King of Fighters* with the terrific visuals of *Fatal Fury Real Bout Special*? Just a thought.



RAIDER ENTOMBED

The life of celebrity grave robber Lara Croft came to a tragic end last Thursday during an escape from a military prison in Nevada. Ms. Croft managed to evade her captors briefly, but fell from a narrow ledge thanks to the facility's poor lighting and her own top-heavy physique.

An autopsy later revealed that the tumble from the ledge was not directly responsible for Lara's demise. Rather, the impact with the ground forced her breasts to jiggle so violently that they smashed into her face, sending fragments of shattered skull bone into her brain. However, the fact that Ms. Croft was already dead didn't stop the prison's military police from swarming her corpse and mercilessly beating it with their batons for over three hours.

A close friend of Ms. Croft suggested that the death may not have been accidental. "Lara's been in countless situations far worse than this... rolling boulders, dinosaur attacks, you name it. Perhaps that was the problem... Lara's life had become so utterly redundant that this was the only way out for her."

In related news, software publisher Eidos Interactive has filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, and its CEO is now running a fish and chips stand in London.



The Gameroom Blitz

So you're telling me you can't wait for the next issue? Are you really this desperate for something to read? Fine. I'll just keep typing until my fingers fall off. JUST so you can have something to do besides twiddle your still-attached thumbs. But then what? Am I supposed to type with my tongue now?



"Oyajiiii...!"