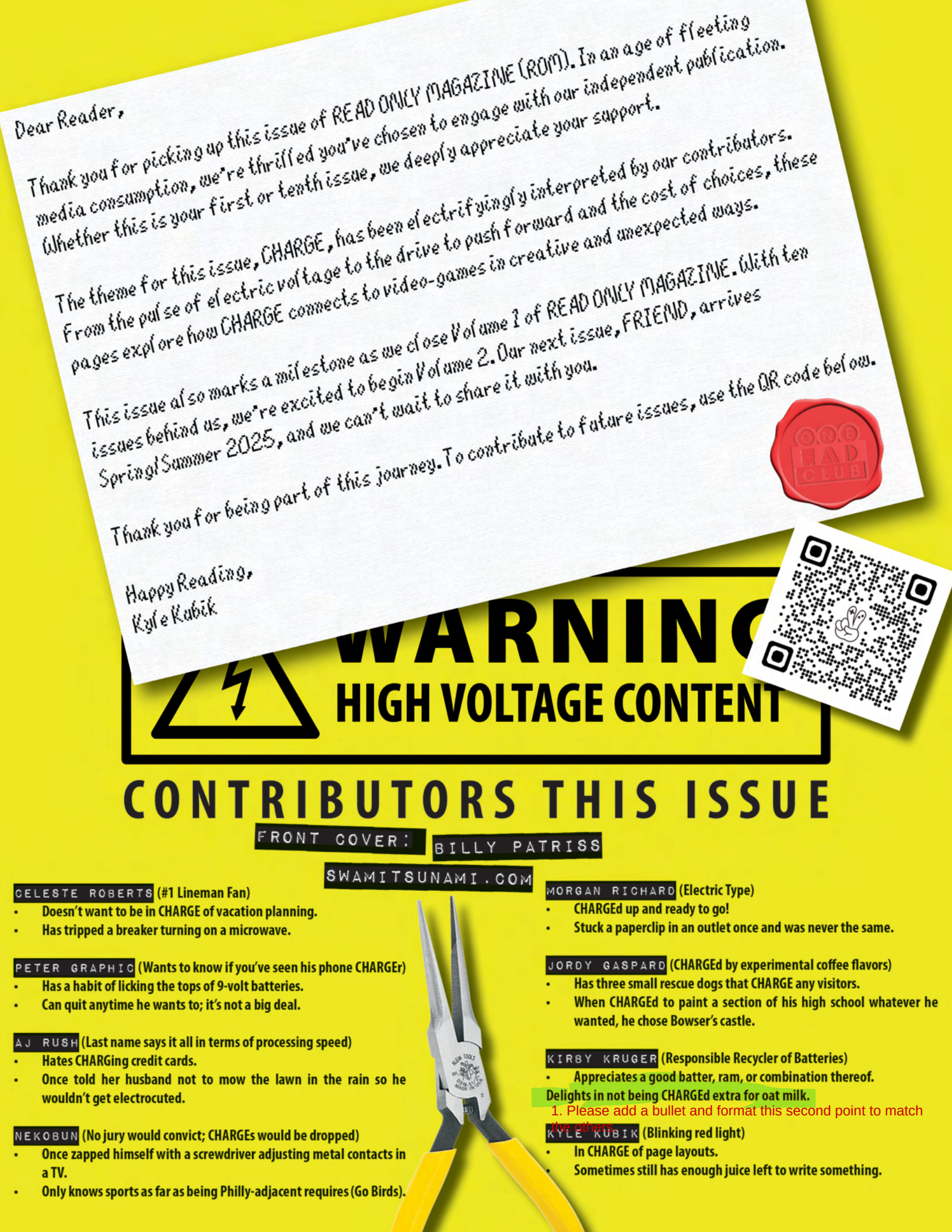






Dear Reader,

Thank you for picking up this issue of READ ONLY MAGAZINE (ROM). In an age of fleeting media consumption, we're thrilled you've chosen to engage with our independent publication. Whether this is your first or tenth issue, we deeply appreciate your support.

The theme for this issue, CHARGE, has been electrifyingly interpreted by our contributors. From the pulse of electric voltage to the drive to push forward and the cost of choices, these pages explore how CHARGE connects to video-games in creative and unexpected ways.

This issue also marks a milestone as we close Volume 1 of READ ONLY MAGAZINE. With ten issues behind us, we're excited to begin Volume 2. Our next issue, FRIEND, arrives Spring/Summer 2025, and we can't wait to share it with you.

Thank you for being part of this journey. To contribute to future issues, use the QR code below.

Happy Reading,
Kyle Kubik



WARNING HIGH VOLTAGE CONTENT

CONTRIBUTORS THIS ISSUE

FRONT COVER: BILLY PATRISS

SWAMITSUNAMI.COM

CELESTE ROBERTS (#1 Lineman Fan)

- Doesn't want to be in CHARGE of vacation planning.
- Has tripped a breaker turning on a microwave.

PETER GRAPHIC (Wants to know if you've seen his phone CHARGER)

- Has a habit of licking the tops of 9-volt batteries.
- Can quit anytime he wants to; it's not a big deal.

AJ RUSH (Last name says it all in terms of processing speed)

- Hates CHARGing credit cards.
- Once told her husband not to mow the lawn in the rain so he wouldn't get electrocuted.

NEKOBUN (No jury would convict; CHARGEs would be dropped)

- Once zapped himself with a screwdriver adjusting metal contacts in a TV.
- Only knows sports as far as being Philly-adjacent requires (Go Birds).

MORGAN RICHARD (Electric Type)

- CHARGEed up and ready to go!
- Stuck a paperclip in an outlet once and was never the same.

JORDY GASPARD (CHARGEed by experimental coffee flavors)

- Has three small rescue dogs that CHARGE any visitors.
- When CHARGEed to paint a section of his high school whatever he wanted, he chose Bowser's castle.

KIRBY KRUGER (Responsible Recycler of Batteries)

- Appreciates a good batter, ram, or combination thereof.

Delights in not being CHARGEed extra for oat milk.

1. Please add a bullet and format this second point to match the others

KYLE KUBIK (Blinking red light)

- In CHARGE of page layouts.
- Sometimes still has enough juice left to write something.



READ ONLY MAGAZINE
ISSUE #10: CHARGE
FALL / WINTER 2024

WHO'S IN CHARGE AT THE END
OF THE WORLD?
BY CELESTE ROBERTS
PG. 2.00

CHECKING FOR A PULSE*
BY PETER GRAPHIC
PG. 5.00

USE THE PBS GAMES APP!
BY AJ RUSH
PG. 9.00

DON'T CALL 'EM CHARLES
BY NEKOBUN
PG. 12.00

^{2. Please change to MEDITATION}
A SHORT MEDITATION ON
CHARGING (COMIC)
BY MORGAN RICHARD
PG. 16.00

SUPPLIER OF LIGHT
BY JORDY GASPARD
PG. 19.00

INTERVIEW WITH LINDA WATSON
GUILLORY
BY CELESTE ROBERTS
PG. 22.00

VIDEO-GAMES: FIGHTING VS.
SCREAMING
BY KIRBY KRUGER
PG. 26.00

CHARGING INTO BATTLE
BY KYLE KUBIK
PG. 30.00

*PULSE MAN ILLUSTRATION
BY SAM NEUKIRCH

EDITOR: CELESTE ROBERTS
EDITOR: AJ RUSH
ART / LAYOUT: KYLE KUBIK



Who's In CHARGE at the END of the WORLD?

by Celeste Roberts
@faeriecrypt

The end of the world began in 2019.

Well, let me clarify – the end of *my* world (as I knew it) began in 2019. In that year alone, I attended five funerals, including one for my maternal grandfather, whom I watched slowly change from a loving man who never met a stranger into a terrified resident of a nursing home. I had attended many funerals before, but experiencing loss as an adult and realizing my own years were decreasing had awoken an existential crisis within me. How many years do I have left? How will people remember me? Will I have made any difference in someone's life?

In the five years since those losses, I have navigated a pandemic, the turmoil of U.S. politics, Hurricane Ida, workplace bullying, and the back-to-back deaths of my father-in-law and my godmother/aunt. As the heavier parts of life trickled in, I began to feel like I was no longer the one in **CHARGE** of my own life.

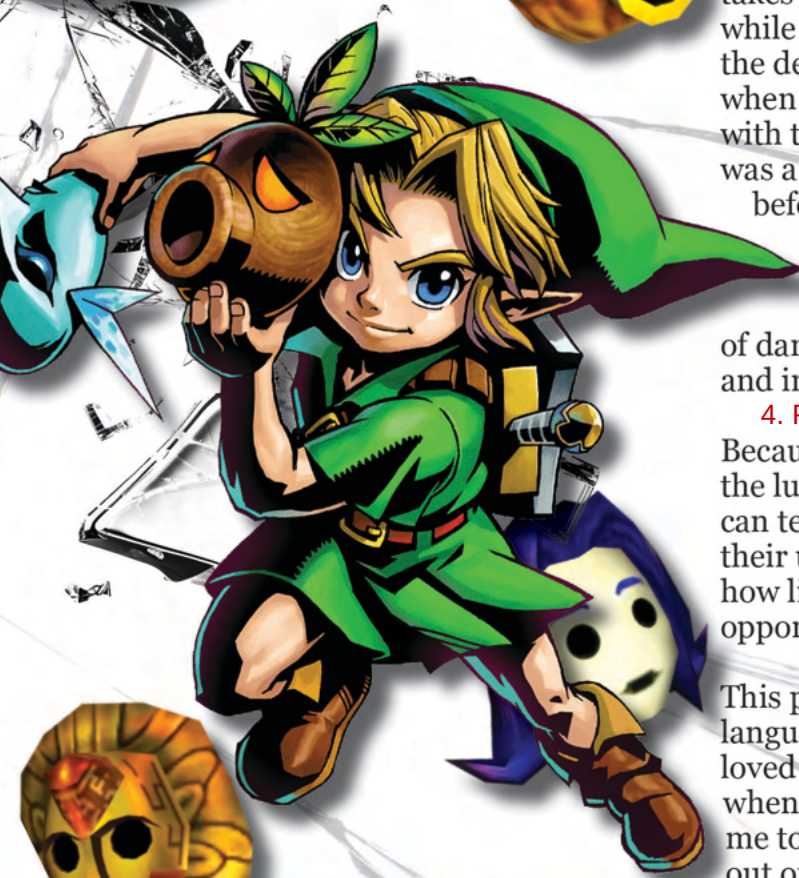
While thinking about how much I have experienced in half a decade, I also have been reflecting on *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* (2000), one of the more polarizing yet poignant titles in the fantasy adventure series that blatantly deals with the end of the world. With themes of loss, fear, grief, failure, and impermanence, the game's unique feature is its time system, which causes either indifference or irritation in players. Link, the protagonist, has only three days to save the land of Termina from the impending moon crash, but never fear – Link's handy Ocarina of Time from the 1998 titular game allows him to travel back to the beginning of the three-day cycle as many times as he wishes and resume his quest. However, no one in the land of Termina will remember him or the events he witnessed in the previous cycle, creating a sort of *Groundhog Day* (1993) purgatory. Try as he might, Link cannot accomplish all the **games'** quests and side quests in one three-day cycle. He must choose what he can handle and then restart to complete the rest.

³ Please move the apostrophe in "games'" so it is singular - game's

As Link explores this new world he is unwillingly thrust into, the ominous moon never lets him forget it's inching closer and closer to land, and the residents comment on it and discuss their plans to either evacuate or shelter in place. Despite the lingering senses of terror and urgency, the gameplay focuses less on dungeons and boss fights and more on interacting with the non-playable characters (NPCs) and side quests. In fact, a significant item is a notebook that tracks how many people Link helps, encouraging Good Samaritanism in the form of delivering items, reuniting lovers, protecting milk deliveries, and comforting a distressed troupe leader, to name a few. Termina's end is, quite literally, in sight, yet the game seems to shift our focus to – or distract us with – altruistic detours, perhaps as a last-ditch effort to give Termina hope in the face of a catastrophe.



My favorite side quest in the game is collecting all 24 masks, each one offering a unique ability to further Link's progress as he endeavors to save Termina from certain celestial doom. When I first played this game in 2000 at age 11, I focused more on each mask's entertaining and useful mechanics. For instance, the Bunny Hood turns Link into a smaller version of Olympic sprinter Usain Bolt, significantly reducing the amount of time it takes to traverse the map. The Blast Mask turns Link into a walking bomb, allowing him to remove debris in his path. The Bremen Mask turns Link into the Pied Piper, leading animals, like chicks and dogs, in an orderly march. Fast-forward to 2024, and my interest in the masks now goes deeper than their functionality.



As an adult nearing 40 at the time of this writing, I now like to think of the symbolism behind each mask. If the player takes Link to the Happy Mask Salesman and talks to him while wearing one of them, the salesman will comment on the deeper meaning behind it. One of my favorite musings is when the salesman shares how Kamuro's Mask "... is filled with the joy a teacher has in finding a good student." Kamuro was a beloved dancer whose ghost regrets that he passed away before he could teach others his final moves. Link plays the "Song Healing" for the distressed phantom, granting him eternal peace. Kamuro, grateful for the relief and permission to rest, leaves behind his likeness and gift of dance with his mask, which gives Link the ability to perform and immortalize Kamuro's choreography.

4. Please add "of" so this is "Song of Healing"

Because of the moon's eventual cataclysm, Link will not have the luxury of time to share the dance for years to come, but he can teach it to some dancers who need a little inspiration for their upcoming performance. This reminds me that no matter how little time we have or how few people we may have the opportunity to influence or assist, every action does matter.

This particular side quest reminds me of my fourth grade language arts teacher, who made me feel so welcome and loved at my new school. She introduced me to other students when she saw me wandering alone at recess, and she invited me to read my favorite books to the class to help me break out of my shell of shyness. I know Kamuro is thankful to have found a good student in Link, but his mask reminds me of how thankful I was to have found such a loving teacher, who passed away only a few years after I was her student. One could say the "mask" she left behind empowered me to befriend others, embrace self-confidence, and joyfully share what lights up my life.

As we witness in Termina and our own realities, life goes on despite loss or its imminence. Shopkeepers happily take your Rupees if you need supplies or want to play a mini-game. Carpenters continue to build scaffolds for the upcoming Carnival of Time, where residents pray for a good harvest and show off their handmade masks. The Stock Pot Inn accepts reservations and operates as a bed and breakfast for its guests.





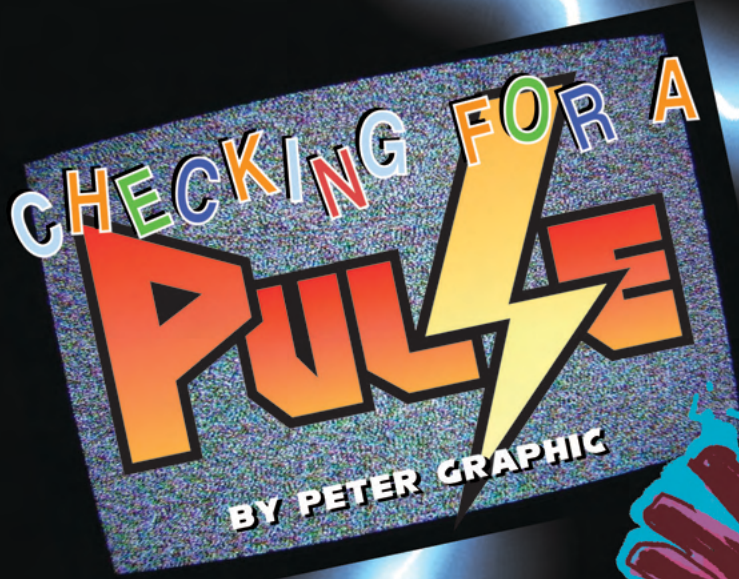
Travelers from all over Termina gradually flock to Clock Town in anticipation of the carnival, obviously not deterred by threats of a moon crash.

I wonder if the game's focus on masks is symbolic of how the characters operate during trying times; after all, they're all facing instances where they must choose a face to display to the world. Despite their fears or negative feelings, they still have to summon the willpower to function and interact with other people.

That's an awful lot like real life, isn't it? No matter what event is going on in your own world, the rest of the planet moves along with its own concerns. It's truly bittersweet: While you may be suffering from an illness, someone else is recovering. While you are searching desperately for a job, someone else is climbing the corporate ranks. On the flip side, while you are preparing for a day of celebration and joy, someone else is struggling to get out of the bed and face the day. We are all "someone else" on the other side of the coin at some point. In the middle of these major events are the normal, everyday occurrences that fill up our hours: bathing, eating, driving, working, cleaning, playing, dreaming, building, shopping ... Like the side quests Link undertakes, these mundane tasks connect us between each "boss battle" and victory in our lives, and, sometimes, we look forward to them for their comfort, stability, and distraction.

So, who's in charge when the world is ending (or, at least, feels like it is)? In the real world, when a natural disaster strikes, government officials are responsible for protecting citizens and ensuring relief efforts begin as quickly as possible. When someone is going through a devastating break up, close friends take the reins and cheer up their pal. In *Majora's Mask*, when the moon is looming over a piece of land, a green-clad boy must pause his journey and fight the demon Majora within the floating rock. I can't pick just one person or group to place in charge of difficult situations; the circumstances determine where my finger points.

All of us will face moments where we are placed in charge of changing or affecting a situation. When impending doom surrounds us, we may feel helpless or deserted. We may feel like giving up and starting fresh, escaping whatever is causing us so much pain. However, I don't think we should sell ourselves short. In the face of imminent disaster, Link witnesses the residents of Termina carry on and believe in tomorrow at the end of the third day (spoiler: finishing the game results in exuberant revelry during the Carnival of Time). We cannot control whatever moon may be hanging over our heads, but, with the virtues and lessons bestowed upon us from the various masks we pick up along our journeys, we can feel emboldened and take charge of our fates to the best of our abilities – and strive to leave our own masks behind to carry others.



Well, hello, reader! It's your old pal, the one and only Peter Graphic! I'm back with an article about a game I really get a **CHARGE** out of (sorry, not sorry). This game has a weird origin story and some really familiar roots, and it ends with a bit of redemption. So, put on a pair of socks, rub them all over the carpet, charge up some static ...

... and let's talk about *Pulseman* (1994).

In 2024, having a gaming console that goes online and lets you download the latest and greatest games seems like a no-brainer, and, for some consoles, it's the only way to play anything! (I'm looking at you, Xbox Series S [2020]). Services like Xbox Game Pass, Sony's PlayStation Plus, and Nintendo Switch Online give players access to brand-new games, previous generations' greatest hits, and even classic games. What a time to be alive!

But back in 1994, having access to libraries of games directly from the console itself was a fairly new concept, and our good friends at the SEGA Corporation wanted to give that power to the people with the Sega Channel (1994-1998). For about \$12-\$19 a month (not including a \$25 setup fee for the adapter), the SEGA Channel was a subscription service for Sega Genesis (1988) owners. Players could call up games on demand, try out demos for games not yet released, or even enter a *Primal Rage Showdown* contest with the winner getting a full-sized *Primal Rage* (1994) arcade cabinet! Subscribers could even get gaming news and cheat codes! Players would download a game to the cart so they could play it as much as they wanted, and then, when the next month came along, they could redownload something else. It was a great way to play titles you would never expect to buy. With 50-70 titles a month, it was almost like a 16-bit Netflix.



Illustration by Sam Neukirch

🌐 [Twitch.tv/samthesilkie](https://www.twitch.tv/samthesilkie)

🐦 @SamTheSilkie

📺 @peter_graphic

🎧 Gaming with The Graphics on Spotify

At its peak, the Sega Channel was reported to have over 250,000 subscribers before ending its services on July 1st, 1998. Do yourself a favor and search for the Sega Channel's boot-up screen on *YouTube* to see what it looked like (very *ToeJam & Earl*-esque [1991], if you ask me), or watch "SEGA Channel is BACK reliving the 90's experience SEGA DOES WHAT NINTENDON'T" (2019) by user 8-Bit Flashback to see a really impressive adapter mod that shows off what the Sega Channel experience was like.

I could probably write a whole article about the Sega Channel and promise I'll get to how it relates to *Pulseman*, but, the truth is, I always wanted it as a kid, but my dad would never allow it. I mean, I don't blame him; \$20 a month in the '90s to play *Primal Rage* (1994) was asking a lot.

Fast forward years later as an adult collector: I ran into the adapter in its original box for \$75 at a gaming convention. Since it evaded my grasp as a child, I almost brought it home with me that day, but I kept hearing my old man in my head telling me it was a waste of money and left it there. Mind you, the Sega Channel is no more. That adapter didn't work – *it didn't do anything* – but I still regret not getting it. I swear, I would have never asked for another game back then again, Dad! Plus, I would have paid you for the cost of the adapter from my allowance! It was a \$2,500 value! So unfair! Anyway ... let's talk about *Pulseman*.

When you booted up Sega Channel, you could pick games from multiple categories, such as "Wings & Wheels" for driving/flying sims, "The Family Room" for kids' games, and "The Think Tank" for puzzle games. In "Test Drives," Sega would occasionally put up games that were exclusive to the Mega Drive (the name for the Sega Genesis outside of North America). Some of its most well-known games offered were *Alien Soldier* (1995) and *Mega Man: The Wily Wars* (1994). Another prominent title was the U.S. debut of our boy *Pulseman* in 1995.

Fun fact? *Pulseman* was originally called *Spark* and was developed by none other than Game Freak with director Ken Sugimori. If those names don't ring a bell, they would be the publisher and director, respectively, of *Pokémon Red* and *Pokémon Blue* (both released in 1996). Crazy to see a developer who's so tied to Nintendo have a game on a Sega system!



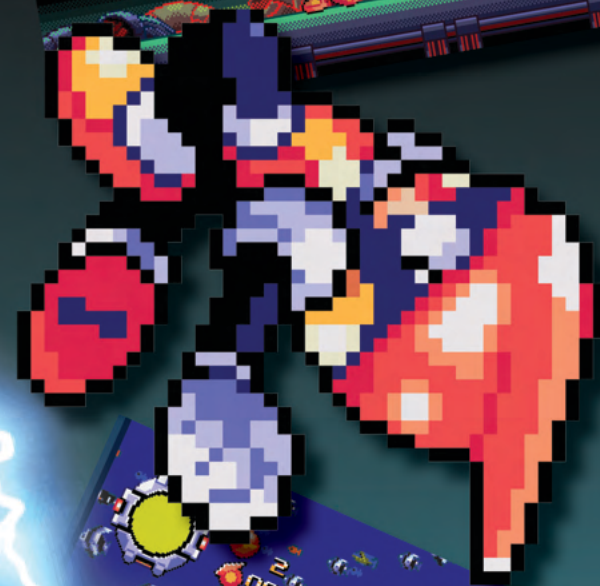


As far as the plot goes, in the year 1999, a young computer engineer named Doc Yoshiyama creates a new AI life-form named “Amabilis.” In a weird turn of events, he ends up falling in love with his creation and uploads a digitized version of himself to be with her. One thing leads to another, and the Doc’s DNA, combined with Amabilis, ends up creating a new life-form named Pulseman. (I know what you’re thinking. Get your mind out of the digital gutter!)



Not only can Pulseman travel between our world and the digital world he came from, but he also has his Voltteccer, a special move that gives him attack abilities and lets him travel along power lines to get around quickly. (Fun fact: Voltteccer translates to “Volt Tackle,” a favorite move from the Pikachu family of Pokémon.)

Unfortunately, living in the digital world (certainly not falling in love with your own computer creation and having a child with it) corrupts Doc Yoshiyama’s mind. He then becomes the evil Doc Waruyama and plans on bringing his menacing AI beings into the real world. If this sounds a bit like *Mega Man* (1987), you’d be right!



I never had the chance to play *Pulseman* on the Sega Channel back in the day (Hey, Dad! Imagine how much money you would have saved from not going to Blockbuster Video!), but I ended up buying a really nice English-translated, fan-made reproduction cartridge years later. I got a real charge out of finally playing a copy of *Pulseman* in my game room.

It’s also worth noting that when you boot up *Pulseman* for the first time, you’ll see a white noise pattern on your screen, and, suddenly, the “SEGA” logo fades in! Sega fans know that when you start up a Genesis game, the first appearance of that Sega Logo can be a cool animated moment, and this is one of the most unique and creative ones in the Genesis library.

Pulseman is your standard 16-bit platformer fare, but the gimmick here is Pulseman needs to charge up his Voltteccer with some electricity. Normally, he can zap his enemies, dash a short distance, or transform into a ball of energy to travel along power lines. But when his Voltteccer is fully charged, Pulseman’s attacks get stronger, and he becomes an energy ball that bounces off of walls to get to higher areas, avoid spikes, and attack enemies.

But look out if Pulseman hits any water! Doing so will completely drain his Voltteccer power up. Bummer!

The levels are bright and colorful and feel a lot like the “Casino Night Zone” levels from the *Sonic the Hedgehog* (1991-present) series. Our voltage-filled friend even gets bonus levels between stages where he turns into a ball of pure electricity and can bounce around smashing blocks *Arkanoid* (1986) style.



The boss battles really shine as well. Sometimes, you're up against a vector fist in a virtual world, or you're beating down Doc Waruyama while he's in a Dr. Robotnik-style robot. There's even a level where the main villain is watching Pulseman on a monitor in the foreground while the gameplay is in the background. It's a really cool hardware-pushing moment.

Overall, *Pulseman* is a fun game with a lot of creative character design. It has a neat gimmick and some decent level design. Check out the TV studio level – it's a personal favorite. I will say that it's hard to navigate the power lines at times since they can be very maze-like. The charge elements also take a while to get used to, and you'll find yourself bouncing around out of control (and, sometimes, you'll end up where you don't want to go!).

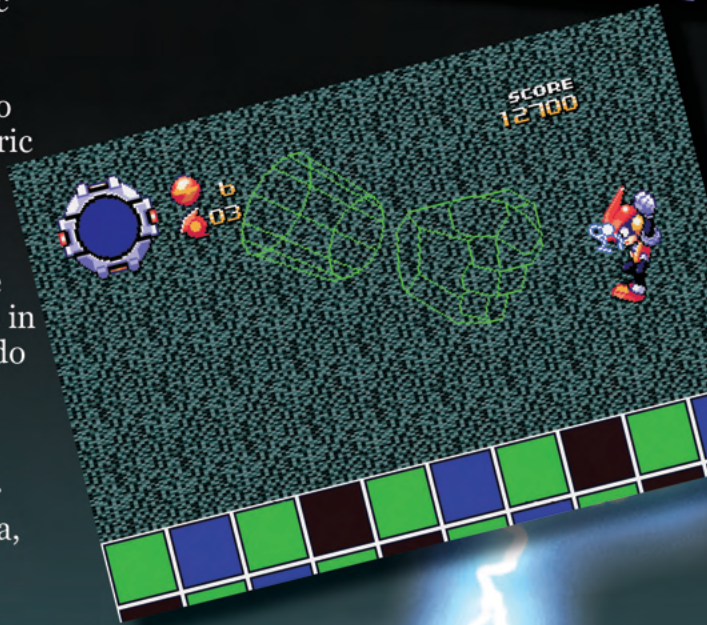
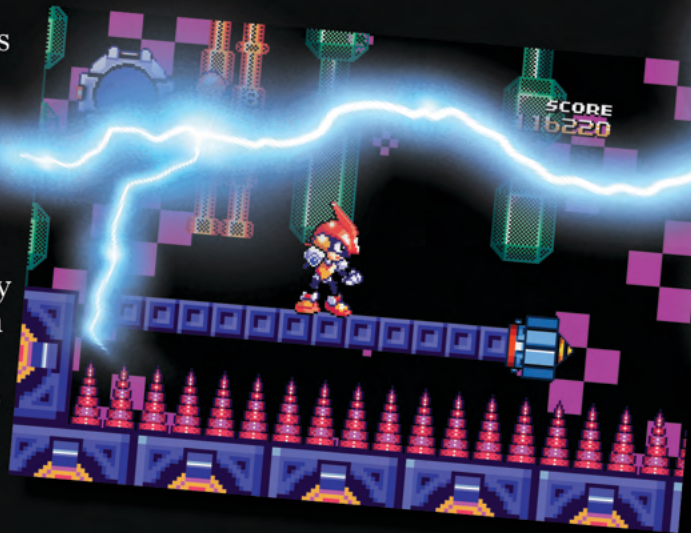
Pulseman could have been a welcome release to the U.S., but, personally, I feel it was held back for being too similar to *Sonic the Hedgehog 3* (1994). Also, while looking great, there are a ton of flashing lights, pulsing objects, and dancing patterns in the parallax scrolling, which can really wear on your eyes. Who knows – with the 1997 episode of the *Pokémon* cartoon "Electric Soldier Porygon," Sega could have been concerned about seizures, too.

Sadly, *Pulseman* never seemed to find its audience back in the '90s, but it did get a release on the Wii Virtual Console (2006) in 2009. As of this writing, it's currently available on the Nintendo Switch (2017) Online service under the Sega Genesis classics library.

Isn't that wild? This game was made by a company famous for a Nintendo game, debuted on an online-only service from Sega, and returned to a Nintendo online-only service that lets you play Sega games. While it's cool being able to play *Pulseman* anytime, I stopped paying for Nintendo Switch Online Service last year myself. I couldn't justify playing \$100 a year just to play old games I already own ... (wait a minute, maybe my Dad had a point!)

At the end of the day, I guess *Pulseman* never really left; he's just been hanging out in the power lines, waiting to come back out and be appreciated by a whole new group of gamers. ◇

"I hear you singing in the wire. / I can hear you thru the whine / and the Wichita Lineman / Is still on the line."
- Glen Campbell, "Wichita Lineman" (1968)

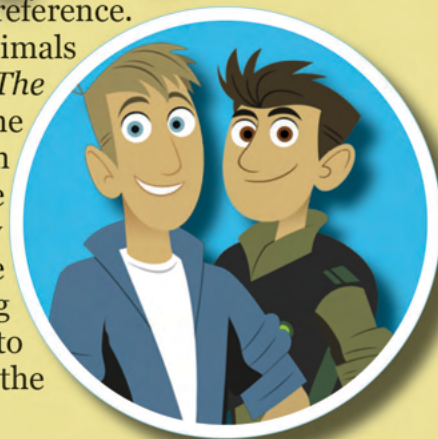


FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE! USE THE PBS KIDS GAMES APP!

BY AJ RUSH

@_aj_rush_

Have you heard of the Kratt brothers? In my house, they're a common reference. Since 2019, Chris and Martin Kratt have been teaching my son about animals and protecting the environment through their PBS television show, *The Wild Kratts*. It's no wonder, then, that *The Wild Kratts*' "Rhino Bowl" mini-game was a hit in our house when we first discovered PBS's free collection of games on their *PBS Kids Games* (2016) app. Through the game, my son was able to engage with the Kratt brothers virtually while busting up Zachbots (robots created by the show's villain, Zach Varmitech, who uses animals in his schemes to make money) to save a baby rhino. What better way to teach kids about protecting the vulnerable creatures around us and the environment that sustains us than to **CHARGE** at villainous robots? Unfortunately, the longevity of this game and the app might be as endangered as the adorable baby rhino himself.



To give some background, children's programming and the young gamers' scene is a veritable cesspool. Apps like *Candy Crush* (2012) and games like *Roblox* (2006) use predatory practices that take advantage of the innocence of children. In addition, many popular video-game series are too difficult. Can you imagine sitting your kid down to play a game so that you can quickly, say, do the friggin' dishes only to be called in every five seconds to read the dialogue in *Super Paper Mario* (2007) on the Wii (2006)?

Aside from the mini-games on the *PBS Kids Games* app, our eldest son started playing popular video-games during the start of the pandemic. We began with *Yoshi's Island* (1995) on the Super Nintendo Classic Mini (2017) by playing little-brother style (his controller wasn't plugged in), but we wanted him to navigate games independently.

Hence, we started to explore games such as *Zack and Wiki: Quest for Barbaros' Treasure* (2007), *Epic Mickey* (2010), *Super Mario Galaxy* (2007), *Mario and Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story* (2009), and *Mario Party: The Top 100* (2017). None of them worked.

He didn't have the skill level, no matter the system, so we tried emulated versions of the oldies: *Super Mario Bros.* (1987), *Super Mario Bros. 2* (1988), and *Super Mario Bros. 3* (1990). We had no luck there, either, so we purchased the Sega Pico (1994) with titles such as *Ecco Jr. and the Great Ocean Treasure Hunt* (1994) and *Richard Scarry's Huckle and Lowly's Busiest Day Ever* (1994). Unfortunately, the controls were stilted at best, and our son was only able to play with great difficulty. When the screen froze, which it often did, we had to stop peeling the carrots to offer assistance.

Every time we felt discouraged, however, there was *PBS Kids Games*, solid as a rock, providing time for us to get things done while our child was safely entertained. "Safely entertained" might seem like an odd thing to say, but safety is a key feature of PBS's collection of games. There are no advertisements enticing children to "Click Here," only to fall down a dangerous rabbit's hole. There are no "featured videos" or paywalls, no "Click here for more Smurfberries!" traps. There's no need to even create a username! Instead, there's just a vibrant menu of FREE games!

In addition to feeling safe with the variety of free mini-games, *PBS Kids Games* retains its mission to provide education (edutainment) for children. For instance, there's "Hero Maker" in the *Xavier Riddle and the Secret Museum* collection of games where children create their own heroes, similar to creating a Mii on the Wii. As they do so, they unlock heroes from history, whereby they learn about their contributions to society. There's also "Pienado" in the *Odd Squad* collection of games. Similar to tangrams, children put together shapes to complete a pattern. Unlike tangrams, the patterns help fortify a forcefield, without which, the villainous Odd Todd's pienado, a literal pie tornado, will smother everyone with cherry-pie filling. This game effectively introduces geometry, but it's not the only math-centric game. *Peg + Cat*'s "Mega Mall" introduces basic addition and the handling of monies as Peg and her friends buy items from the teens' grocery list. For smaller children, there are games such as *Sesame Street*'s "Letter Dance Party," which teaches the alphabet, *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood*'s "Bathrooms," which teaches children about basic hygiene, and *Arthur*'s "Kindergarten Helpers," where children are prepared for the start of primary school.



Other games scratch the repetition itch. *Nature Cat*'s "Hal's Big Dig" falls in this category. The objective is to dig up dinosaur bones before the clock runs out — but the bone collecting becomes irrelevant. With the addition of the clock, what results is the screen version of button mashing (if you have the app on your phone or tablet). The game even stops putting out *new* dinosaur bones, but one just keeps happily tapping away to beat the clock. The aforementioned *Wild Kratts*' "Rhino Bowl" also falls into the repetition category. The mechanics are simple. One swipes a finger on the screen to angle a full-grown rhino to charge. Like bowling, the rhino crashes into and destroys the evil Zachbots as they try to capture the baby rhino. This is literally all. Some of the Zachbots take two hits, and some disappear and reappear, but the mechanic stays the same. I'd attest that the repetitive, hyperstimulating nature of this game and "Hal's Big Dig" is what hooked my son and brings him back for more, even now at eight years old.

Some might say that games like "Hal's Big Dig" or "Rhino Bowl" don't belong under the umbrella of publicly funded programming. Shouldn't all of PBS's tax-dollar-generated games be educational? What are children even learning with games like "Hal's Big Dig" and "Rhino Bowl"? Recently, a number of children's programs have come under attack for being repetitive, uninspired, and overstimulating. *Cocomelon* (2006), a network featuring animated songs of classic nursery rhymes and an accompanying television show, is one such example. As reported by Laura Grainger of *HerFamily*, it began in 2021 when an *Instagram* user posted a video of her toddler trying to run away because she turned off the program. In response to the video, many people, including child development specialist Jerrica Sannes, criticized *Cocomelon*, stating that its frantic pacing is addictive with potential to cause ADHD. Similar claims were made again this year by Mark Travers in *Forbes*. Couldn't some argue that "Hal's Big Dig" and "Rhino Bowl" fall into the same category?

In a rebuttal to the *Cocomelon* controversy and, by proxy, PBS's host of hyperstimulating, repetitive games, many such as Emily Oster of *Parent Data* have argued that length of screen time, not the pacing of the program itself, can have more of an impact on a child's development. In addition, Oster suggests that heredity contributes more to the development of ADHD in children. Hence, there's a chance these games aren't as damaging as some suggest. To add to this, mind-numbing, hyperstimulating media is here to stay. It's not going anywhere. Anyone remember "Minesweeper" from 1990 and "SkiFree" from 1991? "The Hamster Dance" from 1998? "Yo Gabba Gabba" from 2007? "Cookie Clicker" from 2013? That being the case, wouldn't a parent prefer their child be exposed to games like "Rhino Bowl" while they're safely nestled amongst a variety of other enticing educational games? Wouldn't a parent prefer a child save a baby rhino with the Kratt brothers, even if it entails repetitive swipes at the screen and dopamine hits from the crashing sounds when Zachbots are destroyed?



There is danger in allowing children to use other platforms for accessing media. For instance, James Bridle discusses *YouTube's* predatory algorithm, which exploits the need for repetition in the child's growing brain, in his 2018 TED talk. Certainly, the *PBS Kids Games* and *PBS Kids Videos* (2011) apps are much safer for children, considering there's little chance MoMo will pop up. Unfortunately, Bridle's point is still relevant in spite of *YouTube's* efforts, and other platforms are no better, not even those suggested by schools. For instance, my eight-year-old discovered "Minecraft Clicker" through a school-approved platform called *Scratch*.



The biggest issue with *PBS Kids Games* is that there are *too* many games. A good number of them glitch out or simply don't work. It'd be a good idea for them to cull through them, which would make life easier for parents simply trying to make dinner without worrying their child will encounter something traumatizing. They could also organize the games better. For instance, age and difficulty levels cannot be easily ascertained, which is problematic when the app features over 250 mini-games. The final issue is with advertising. Many parents I've spoken with have no idea the app exists in spite of its winning Best Game App this year and years prior at the Kidscreen Awards. Case in point: A few weeks ago, the couple next to us at our local diner had their toddler watching *Paw Patrol* (2013) on their phone. When I leaned over and recommended the *PBS Kids Games* and *PBS Kids Videos* apps, the mother thanked me, but I could tell she wouldn't check it out (or maybe it's because I'm uncomfortably engaging with strangers, which my husband points out — it's up for debate).



Some argue that PBS will survive, but the network comes under attack every few years. Quick Google searches reveal that it nearly lost funding in 2005, 2011, and 2013. It was also proposed throughout the 2016 to 2020 Trump presidency. Just this past year, the appropriations bill was passed by the house, allotting zero dollars for CPB, PBS's parent company. Luckily, it was blocked by the U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee, according to George Winslow of *TV Tech*. In spite of such recurring threats, couldn't it be argued that popular shows will sustain PBS? Unfortunately, in 2018, PBS lost the rights to *Thomas and Friends* (1984) and *Bob the Builder* (1999). A few years later, in 2020, Max acquired *Sesame Street* (1969). It's nearly assured PBS will be threatened again if it can't float and retain the rights to popular programs.

I hope that PBS is able to fortify themselves. I hope that *PBS Kids Games* becomes more widely known and that this article can help with this objective. Because in a *Skibidy Toilet* (2023) world where "Popcat" (2020) is popular amongst millions of children, I'd recharge with the Kratt brothers and "Rhino Bowl" any day. ♦



DON'T CALL 'EM CHARLES

by Nekobun

📺 twitch.tv/nekobun | 📺 youtube.com/nekobun | 📧 @nekobun* | 📺 nekobun.bsky.social

*FYI - The "o" is a zero (Twitter)

As someone effectively raised on Nintendo and, by extension, the *Super Mario Bros.* series of games (1985-present), there was a certain kind of magic in the series' leap from the Nintendo Entertainment System (1983) to a newer, more powerful, more "super" platform in 1990. Other players may have been primarily enchanted by the graphical updates, audio improvements, or the prospect of exploring a whole new realm in the form of Dinosaur Land in *Super Mario World* (1990), but, for me, the draw was a little different. As teased by a game guide brought in by a Japanese exchange student when I was in elementary school, *Super Mario World* brought the biggest expansion of the enemy cast in the series to that point.

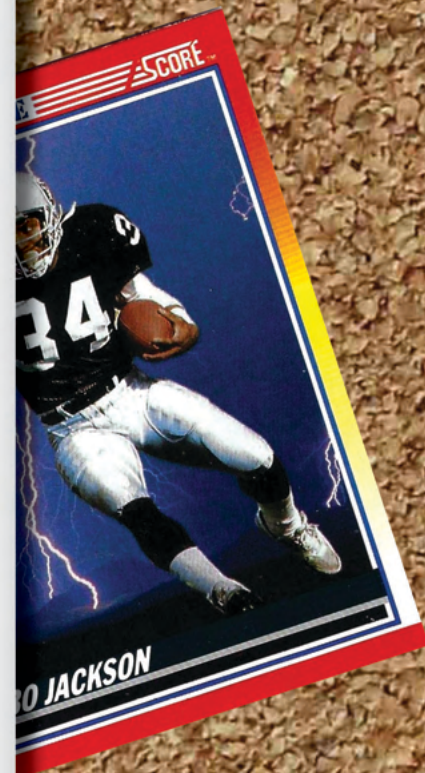
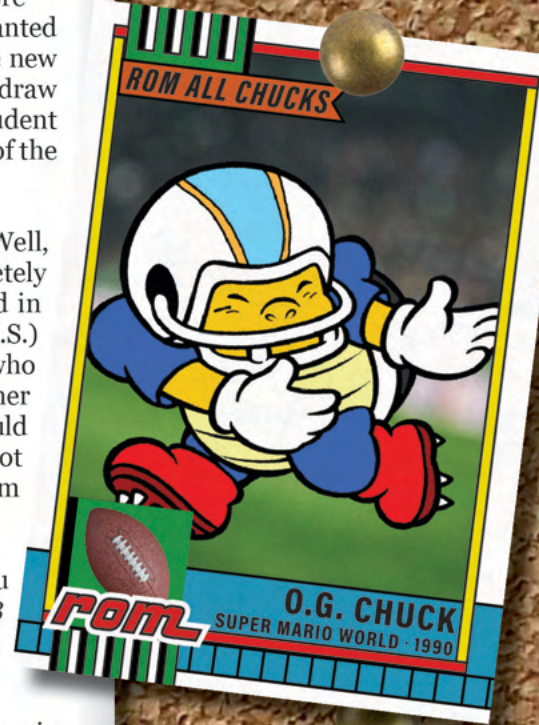
Let me qualify that a little bit before people start yelling at me or angrily mailing in "Well, ACTUALLY" postcards or whatever. When I say "expansion," I'm referring to completely new faces to the franchise rather than variants of villains that had been introduced in previous games. Additionally, I'm disqualifying *Super Mario Bros. 2* (1988 in the U.S.) on account of the whole "originally *Doki Doki Panic* (1987)" thing countless fools who saw *Scott Pilgrim* (2004) as aspirational have bored potential dates with. In other words, the enemies were a completely new cast created for a non-Mario game and would completely undermine this overlong introduction if I allowed them. Oh, and we're not gonna count inanimate objects, like huge steel balls or saw blades, despite some of them having names on records. If it has no face, it does not place.

The Koopalings are variations on Bowser for the purposes of this exercise. Shhh. You could call me a hypocrite for not including Bob-ombs as new in *Super Mario Bros. 3* (1988) since their origins are in the disqualified *Super Mario Bros. 2*, but whatever. Fight me.

By those restrictions, *Super Mario Bros. 3* only works nine new enemies into the mix (10 if you count Nipper and Muncher variants as a separate family from Piranha Plants). *Super Mario World*, on the other hand, has a whole 15 fresh foes to deal with. You could argue that Sumo Bros. are more adjacent to the legacy Hammer Bros. family than the main subject of this piece, to which they bear more of a visual resemblance, and maybe lump Reznors in with Dino Rhinos and Dino Torches, but that still leaves *Super Mario World* with a four-point lead.

Two of those new ne'er-do-wells appear in the first *Super Mario World* stage typically played, "Yoshi's Island 2." Unless, of course, you like to get freak-nasty with it, go left, and do "Yoshi's Island 1" first to get to the Yellow Switch Palace. That'll show you the Rexes first, I guess. But this is a *Mario* game, so we go right here, which means we play "Yoshi's Island 2." Now, as much as I love Monty Moles, they don't really fit the title of this issue (you in back with your hand up to point out they and their larger Mega Mole cousins pretty aggressively **CHARGE** at you – I didn't say I was taking questions or comments), so that just leaves Chuck. Not the ones of the Brown variety that allegedly had hoes, but the Chargin' variety. Wow, we got there, and it's only the fifth paragraph.

Chargin' Chucks have always stuck with me for some reason. I'm not sure if it's their unrelenting nature right out the gate of this new game, their peculiar grounding in the human world (what, with the American football protection they're sporting), or being one of the first enemies (at least, that I can remember) that requires multiple jumps atop to take out, but they're always a delight when they come up. Imagine my shock when I found out they're only in around a dozen games in the entire *Super Mario* franchise. I'd wager that a number of *Super Mario Bros. 2*'s staples have made more appearances than our friend Charles. They also haven't seen all that much in the way of change or variation through the years, which is surprising given how easily they could be iterated upon through other sports. So, let us honor the Chargin' Chuck, mostly by my making inane observations on (most of) his appearances to date.



Super Mario World does the most playing around with the Chargin' Chuck concept, throwing as many different behaviors for them into the mix as they do Koopa family members. The official *Mario Mania Player's Guide* from *Nintendo Power* (1991) names six of the original eight variants, but we'll take a quick look at all of them, discussing each on its coherence with the characters' football theming but in a completely subjective, arbitrary fashion.

The Lookout Chuck is the version most players are familiar with and the version most carried forward in future Chuck appearances. This version hangs around in position 'til a brothered Mario shows up in its line of sight, and then it immediately starts hauling ass towards its target in an attempt to presumably tackle him. Very football, indeed. Later stages introduce the Confused Chuck, which, I assume, was named as much because it has a penchant for throwing baseballs. However, the game did release in the latter career of Bo Jackson, renowned and heavily marketed for his simultaneous careers in professional football AND baseball. So, I'll allow it. Passin' Chucks continue the adherence to football vibes by kicking football projectiles towards your brother of choice, though I have to dock a few points for kicking clearly not being "passin'," per the name. It's like some weird inversion of nominative determinism. Assigned "Passin'" at birth? I'm not sure where I'm going with this.

Things get a bit more peculiar from there as we have a return to apt naming with Clappin' Chucks and Splittin' Chucks, which jump and clap or split into three individuals, respectively. I feel like both could be nods to cheerleading performances, however, so we're still kind of on-brand here. Alternatively, the Splittin' Chuck could be a reference to a huddle breaking up, so I don't feel like it's too much of a stretch yet. Two other variants, left unnamed by the aforementioned guide, can jump really high or call in additional foes with a whistle, so they also kind of fit the bill, but I have no excuse for the Diggin' Chuck.

As the name implies, he digs. Specifically, he digs up a rock and rolls it at you. Not digs like a Monty Mole in any capacity; you'll recall I already said they don't fit the issue's theme, even though they kind of do. The closest thing to digging-as-a-sport I can think of is spelunking, honestly, and, if anything, that's just a recipe for disaster once the Chuck in question is beguiled by the cave lights and replaced by its cave double. Which could account for the Splittin' Chucks, now that I think of it ...

We get one last, and much briefer, glimpse at Chargin' Chucks on the Super NES by way of the Super Scope as they show up to hurl explosives in *Yoshi's Safari* (1993). Apparently, at least at the time, working for the Koopa family paid pretty well as they have run of Float Castle II and presumably live there. Not bad if you can spend the off-season in a literal palace.

Anyway, that's the last we'd see of the Chargin' Chuck family until *Super Mario 3D World* (2013). Yeah, they omitted the poor guys from mainline *Mario*, aside from some less-official side media, for over a decade. Their 3D debut was a throwback to the Lookout Chucks, behavior-wise, although somewhere in the intervening years, they'd forgotten how to securely strap their helmets on as they lose them after one hit now. For all I know, it is the same equipment and just doesn't fit as well anymore, in which case, I apologize, though you think Bowser'd been around long enough that he could have coughed up the coins to refit his forces by then. Poor bastards already face enough chronic traumatic encephalopathy as is.

Our Chucks would keep on Chargin' in 3D by way of *Captain Toad: Treasure Tracker* (2014), where they're much more of a threat to little mushroomy bastards than they are to grown human adults, apparently. By the time the good Captain left to track treasures, your average Chargin' Chuck had gotten much better



at retrieving a removed helmet and putting it back on, making them harder to defeat, and I imagine any ambulatory fungus would have much less resistance to direct force than any combination of meat and bone.

Super Mario Odyssey (2017) continues the tradition of helmet loss, further raising my concern over safety considerations under the Bowser Koopa regime in both war and sport, but I guess you gotta allow for gameplay somewhere. Direct blunt force application in the form of Mario's foot or hatforce application (in the form of Cappy) removes a Chuck's helmet in this game, leaving them open to possession with another hat throw. By this point, the Chuck corps have collectively gotten very good at their namesake "Chargin'," being capable of dashing shoulder-first through very large, very solid rocks in addition to the usual meat and mushroom creatures they might encounter. This buff in strength seems to have come at the cost of the jumping prowess exhibited by their high jump-and jump/clap-inclined siblings, however, as the Chucks of *Odyssey*'s Moon Kingdom are ground-bound despite the lower gravity up there. What happened? Selective hiring (or even breeding) for Chargin'-beneficial traits? A loss of capability following the departure of their original coach, who could have been Wario, judging by the similar skill sets? I feel like the idea of eugenicist Bowser is a bit dismissive of real-world history and just generally silly to explore here, and, if I'm being honest, I know little of Wario outside of *Super Mario Land 2* (1992) and the *WarioWare* series (2003), so I don't feel comfortable engaging in conjecture on either possibility.

But, yeah, that's it for main-line Chargin' Chuck appearances, which feels like kind of a waste. There've been Chargin' Chucks in several of the *Mario & Luigi* games (2003-present), sure, but the most notable one would be *Mario & Luigi: Paper Jam* (2015), wherein their attacks are very football in flavor, what, with tackling and throwing footballs at our boys. A welcome return to tradition, as it were. In a similarly pulpy vein, a trio of Chargin' Chucks appear in *Paper Mario: The Origami King* (2020), taking a presumably therapeutic soak in Shangri-Spa's Spring of Purification. The last Splittin' Chuck, perhaps? We may never know.

Despite the Chucks' origins featuring a wide array of athleticism, none of the Mario-flavored sports games bothered bringing one on board until *Mario Golf: Super Rush* (2021). That's right – it took until the Nintendo Switch (2017). Even the *Super Mario Strikers* games (2005-present) pass the Chucks over as goalies in favor of *Super Mario Bros. 3*'s Boom-Boom. I guess the golf connection, albeit a belated one, makes some sense given that famous football players aren't necessarily strangers to the fairway. (Unfortunately, the first one that comes to mind is, uh, Orenthal James Simpson, so maybe we shouldn't keep following that thread for the moment.) It does strike me as a little peculiar that Chuck's one of the golfers with the lowest spin rating, which runs contrary to the whole idea of putting some spiral on a football pass. Maybe that's why the Passin' Chucks are actually kicking. Omitting any Chuck from *Mario Hoops 3-on-3* (2006) seems like an absolute insult given they manage to cram a whole fistful of *Final Fantasy* (1987) characters in there instead. As *3-on-3* was released between *Yoshi's Safari* and *Super Mario 3D World*, they may have very well forgotten how to jump already by that point, in which case, I guess it makes sense. *Mario Sports Mix* (2010), on the other hand, has less of an excuse as they throw in a *Dragon Quest* (1986-present) Slime in addition to the *Final Fantasy* characters returning from *Hoops!* And *Mario Sports Superstars* (2017)? Absolutely criminal there's not a Pitchin' Chuck in sight for the baseball portions. And don't even get me started on the *Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games* sub-franchise (2007-present), which somehow gives us zero Chucks despite dusting off Eggman Nega. *Mario Kart Tour* (2019) would put not one, but TWO whole Chargin' Chucks behind the wheel eventually, one of which is golden with silver accents and is probably way too low of a percentage chance on the loot pipe or overpriced in the microtransactions store. Become the trophy you wish to see in the world, I guess.

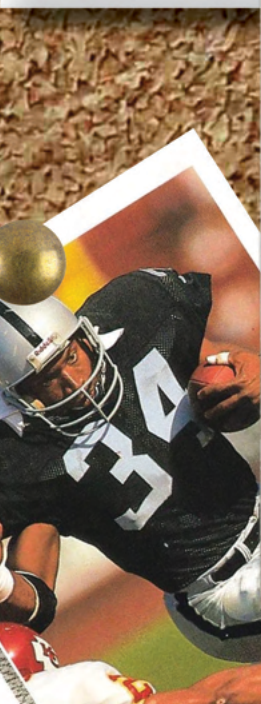
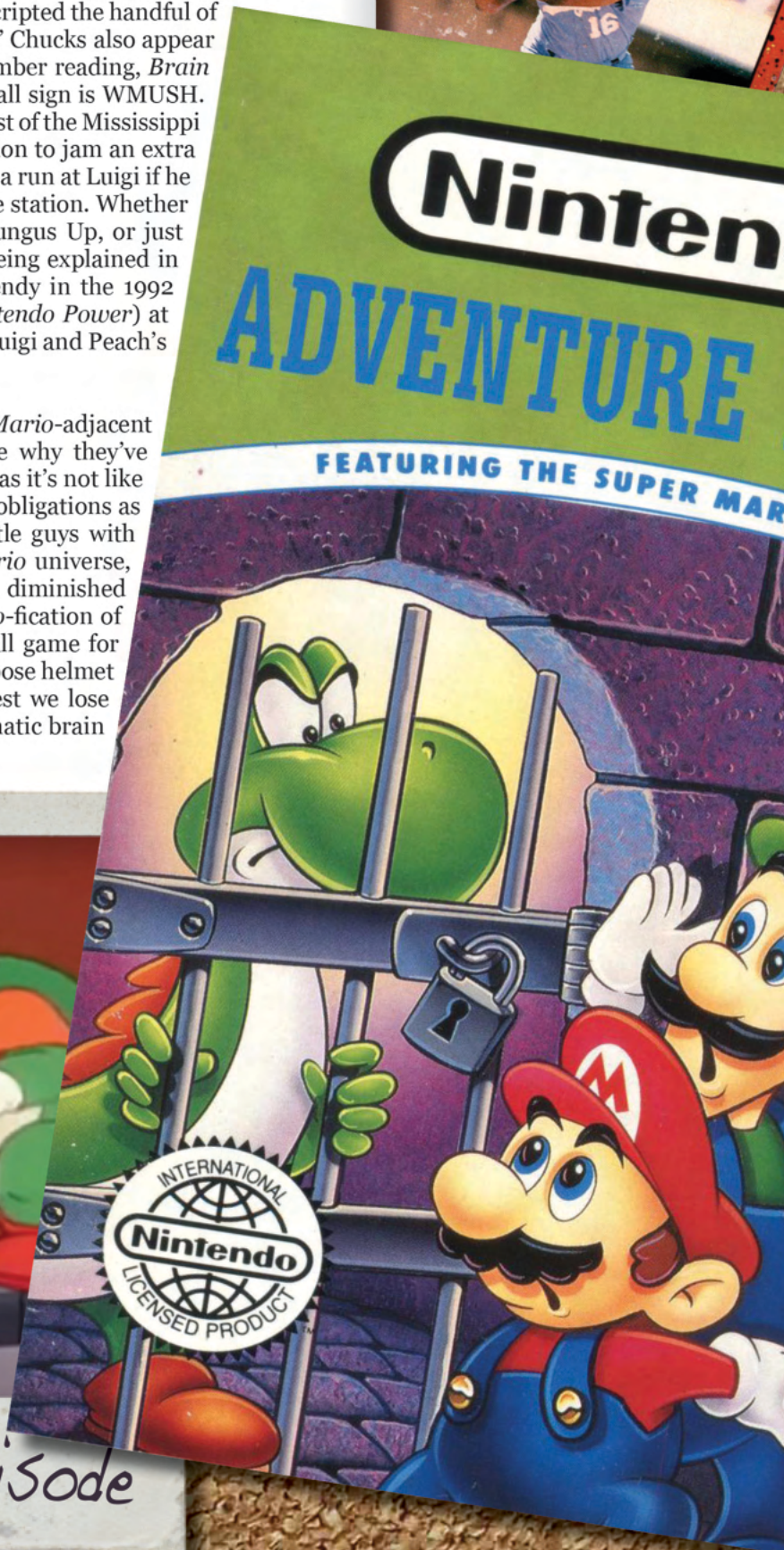


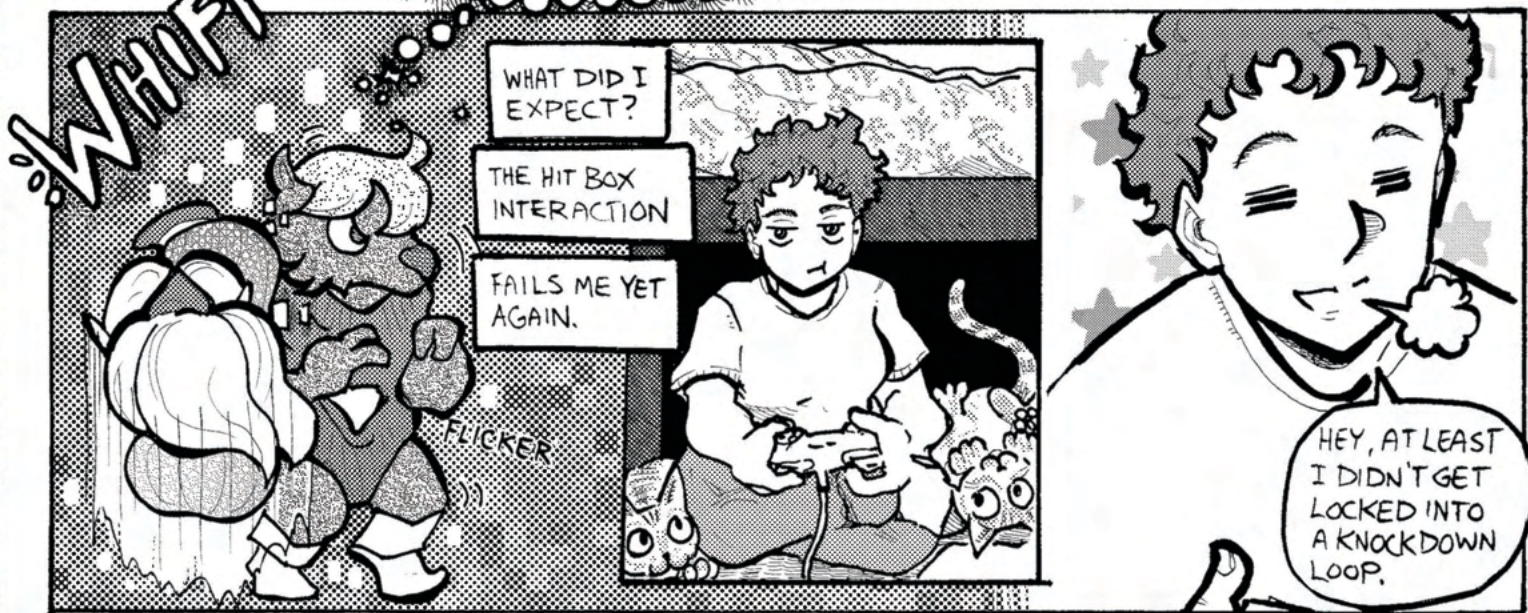
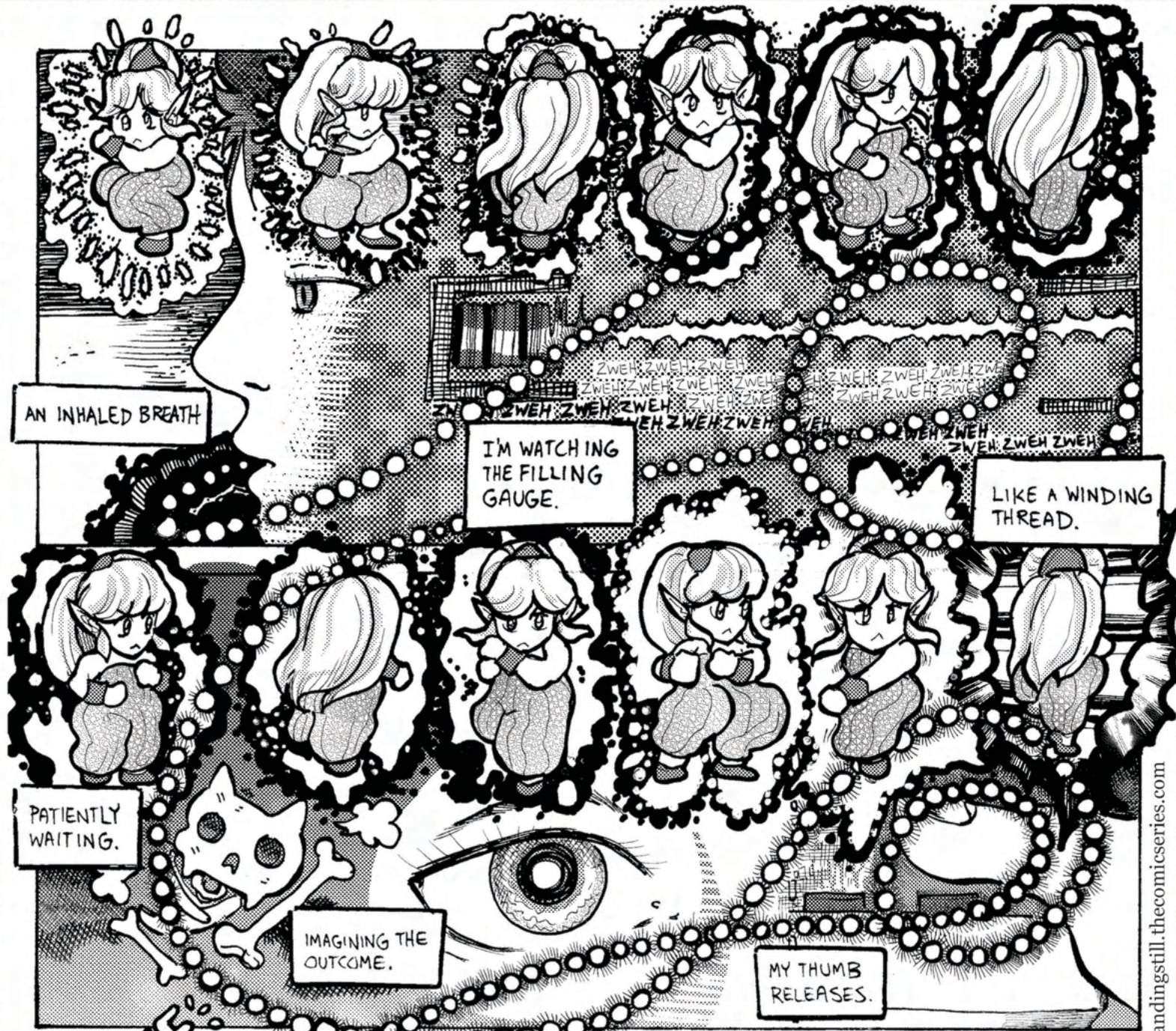
As for the “less-canon” Chargin’ Chuck cameos I mentioned that don’t fit these other categories, the ones that most caught my eye are in the 1990 *Super Mario World* cartoon (it’s a blast from the past, you’ve got to move fast, et cetera), wherein they are given the even more on-the-nose name of “Koopala Football Players.” The alternate names for the Koopalings in this series and its precedent, *The Adventures of Super Mario Bros. 3* (1990), are already pretty bad, but it sounds like whoever scripted the handful of episodes featuring Chucks ran out of shits to give. Chargin’ Chucks also appear in the only *Nintendo Adventure Book* (1991-1992) I remember reading, *Brain Drain* (1992), albeit only briefly at a radio station whose call sign is WMUSH. This would imply the Mushroom Kingdom is somewhere east of the Mississippi River in the United States and also, somehow got permission to jam an extra letter in there. Anyway, this time around, the Chucks make a run at Luigi if he chooses to steal some precious Fungus Up cola while at the station. Whether this is out of standing orders, a sponsorship deal with Fungus Up, or just general love for the soda, is not something I remember being explained in the book. They also get sicced on the Mario crew by Wendy in the 1992 *Super Mario Adventures* manga (the one that ran in *Nintendo Power*) at one point, though it escapes me as to whether it is during Luigi and Peach’s absolutely legendary outfit swap or not.

So, there you have it: a bit of a ramble on one of my few Mario-adjacent fixations, the Chucks That Do A CHARGE. I’m not sure why they’ve remained wedged in my brain for over three decades now, as it’s not like I’m particularly interested in gridiron football beyond my obligations as Philadelphia proximate (go Birds). They’re just weird little guys with arguably the least amount of fit in the greater *Super Mario* universe, but they still manage to keep coming back. Perhaps in a diminished capacity, and robbed of their birthright with the de-Mario-fication of Retro Studios’ proposed (and eventually canceled) football game for the GameCube, but enduring nonetheless. Hopefully, the loose helmet issues are resolved or, at least, reduced going forward, lest we lose these peculiar fellows to a collectively career-ending traumatic brain injury. ♦



Mama Luigi Episode







NEVER MISS AN ISSUE JOIN OUR CLUB



FOR ONLY \$3 PER MONTH

- GET READ ONLY MAGAZINE AS IT'S RELEASED
- ENJOY EARLY ACCESS TO PODCASTS
- PLEDGE MORE FOR EXCLUSIVE APPAREL AND TO REQUEST TOPICS

JOIN OUR PATREON:

www.ONERADCLUB.com

READ WHAT YOU LOVE. LOVE WHAT YOU WEAR.



AVAILABLE NOW: ONERADTEE.COM

SUPPLIER OF LIGHT

by Jordy Gaspard

@jordygaspard

"The world lies shrouded in darkness.

The winds die...

The seas rage...

The earth decays...

But the people believe in a prophecy, patiently waiting for its fulfillment.

'When darkness veils the world, four Warriors of Light shall come.'

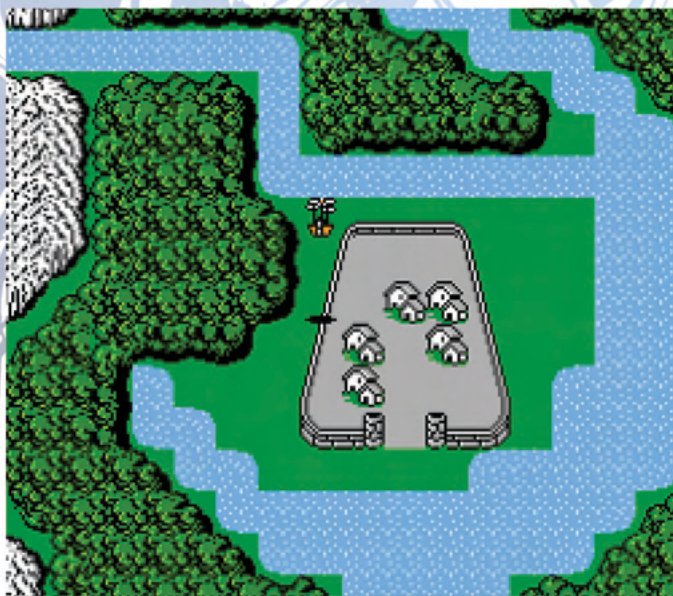
After a long journey four young warriors did at last appear...

...and in the hand each was holding a crystal."

Prelude to Final Fantasy (1987)

This prophecy has loomed over untold generations as the beacon of hope for a world plummeting into despair. Monsters lurk just outside every town's border, and crops wither on the vine. Everyone agrees something is wrong with the world, but debates rage as to the plague's origin. Is it due to the physical embodiment of chaos sowing seeds of violence throughout the land, or is it the result of human mistreatment of the environment?

The debate tipped in favor of the chaos theory when four "heroes" appeared out of nowhere, claiming to be the foretold Warriors of Light. They aren't the first to make the claim, but they still have everyone else convinced that they are the ones destined to save the world. They travel town-to-town doing what one would expect of a hero: rescuing princesses, vanquishing pirates ... those sorts of things. Most recently, they have been lurking around Crescent Lake, where I run the best shop in the world. Our small town's only claim to fame is the local Circle of Sages, a dozen or so local wannabe mystics spouting off vague prophecies and handing out canoes — canoes!



Why, of all items, would they choose to reward the Warriors of Light a canoe for defeating the Four Fiends? Calling that a key item seems like a cop-out to me, but the heroes accepted it gracefully, never thinking a common mode of transportation was an odd reward for killing a pseudogod.

I, on the other hand, did provide them with important items, useful items, items like potions and restorative Phoenix Downs, essentials for a hero's survival through a rough battle. And, more importantly, I **CHARGED** those heroes, making a hefty profit in the process. Whether they save the world or not, their visits always fill my pockets.

Normally, the four heroes appear without fanfare, make a round between the shops, and disappear just as quickly. A few days later, they return and repeat the cycle, but it's been several days since their last appearance. I keep hoping that one will be struck by a Manticore's poison dart, forcing them to return in search of an antidote, which I have in abundance. A shop owner must always anticipate a customer's needs.

In Crescent Lake, every building doubles as some sort of business. In addition to my item shop, we have a church, an inn, an armor and a weapon shop, and two magic shops, one black and one white. (That division is a story unto itself involving twins, a jilted lover, and Ochu toxins. That was the talk of the town before the Warriors of Light strolled through.) Like most towns, our shop owners forged a pact ensuring supplies did not repeat themselves amongst any businesses in town, effectively making each of us a local monopoly. And with how Crescent Lake was built, any visitor must run from one individual shop to the next. My shop is set in the best spot, right by the entrance, where heroes still have pouches filled with fresh gil looted from Giants and the like.

Not like I need the benefit of location; items are, by far, the superior business model! None of the other shops are set up for long-term success. The spell shop owners charge exorbitant prices and bar any group from purchasing more than one of each spell. They claim this is due to each spell being a “limited edition,” but I’ve seen their storerooms filled with overflowing copies of the same two tomes. A shop can never hope to garner brand recognition without repeat business.

Armor and weapons can technically be purchased again and again, but those shops have their own problems. No hero needs multiple mithril helms. Heroes are always on the lookout for the next-strongest equipment, but the shops’ inventory remains stagnant. Maybe if equipment shops offered enhancements or repairs, they would thrive, but I’ve never seen a shop offer those services here.

The most outrageous thing, however, is how the other shops bar certain individuals from wielding their equipment or learning their spells. Who’s to dictate that only a ninja can equip a katana or that a monk can’t use any weapons? Why can a black mage learn Thundaga but not a white mage? I would think a fighter would be most efficient if they could swing a sword, blast spells, and heal the party all at the same time. Every one

of the other shops is too specialized to succeed. They are cutting down their potential customer base. I can’t understand how anyone stays in business (excluding myself, of course!).

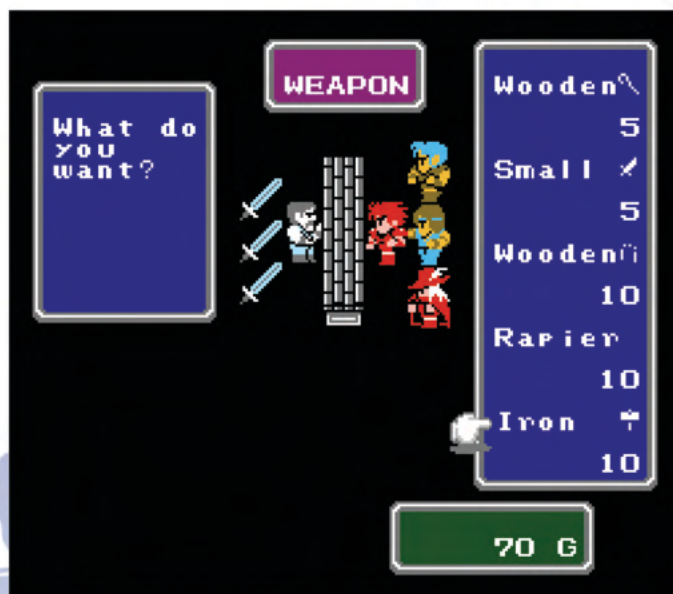
The true gil is in my specialty, curative items. Potions, antidotes, and tents are always in demand and able to be used by anyone. Potions are cleverly designed so that just one vial never seems quite enough; the hero keeps chugging them until they are at full health, leading them back to me to buy more. Did a mage’s magic run out? Here’s an ether, or two, or three. Why don’t you max out your inventory, just in case? Fighter, thief, or monk? I don’t care. No matter one’s class, every hero can use my products.

Every curative is just as described on the label, except for the Phoenix Down ... those are

completely misleading. I blame the manufacturer. “For only 500 gil, you can revive a party member! A deal too good to be true!” I hope whoever on the marketing team crafted that item description was well compensated because it works. Phoenix Downs are always a top seller, but the descriptions couldn’t be further from the truth. Yes, the feather can resuscitate someone who has been knocked out, but it is nowhere near strong enough to revive the dead.

Imagine what sort of chaos would come from people reviving others? Undead abominations already plague the world: things like skeletons, mummies, and, if rumors are true, a lich, which lies at the bottom of the Cavern of Earth. If the Four Fiends could be revived by something as common as a Phoenix Down ... I don’t want to think of the consequences. I am thankful that no Mindflayer has learned how to use the items they carry under that mass of tentacles.

Monsters like those are my only real competition. Heroes don’t need to buy items if the creatures of the world hold a never-ending flow of potions and ethers. No one knows why wild beasts carry curatives; it isn’t like they know how to use them. How would a unicorn even use an ether? On the other hand, those same enemies are heroes’ primary source of income and the reason for the



purchase of most antidotes and cottages. This mercantile town could never survive without monsters lurking outside our borders.

The Warriors of Light have slain plenty of the local wildlife since their first visit. The heroes head out, spend days killing monsters, and return to town battered but more powerful than before. They sleep in the inn, buy more items, and return to the wilds. I'm appreciative of their repeat business, but they do not say, "Good morning," or anything else that may be seen as polite. Their conversations with me always begin with "Buy." Then, after looking through my wares, they rattle off whatever items they need and hand me exact gil. The group is either socially awkward or exceptionally rude. I prefer to believe that days filled with fighting off Goblins or Sahagins have left them inexperienced with even the most casual of social interactions.

My biggest pet peeve is how they never acknowledge my shop has a name, simply referring to my lifelong passion as "Items." That's fair. I refuse to learn their names, either. I simply refer to them by their class title: the fighter, the red mage, the whatever. If my name doesn't matter to them, then each of them can be just another unnamed character in my story.

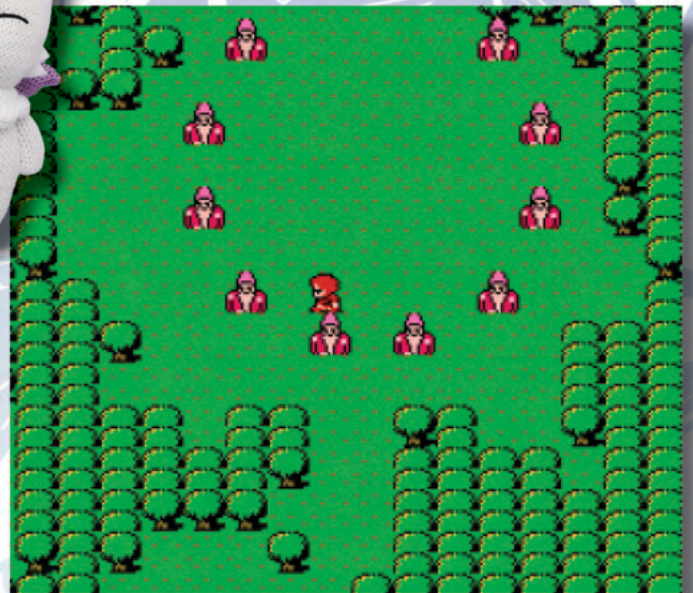
I've heard tales of some merchants traveling from place to place who are respected by other heroes, patroned even. They withhold their rarest, most powerful items until after the heroes have paid tens of thousands of gil. Meanwhile, these Warriors of Light won't pay a single gil over the asking price. They are so quick to leave my shop that I don't have the time to pitch my loyalty program. They have abandoned hundreds, if not thousands, of reward points that could be used for free branded stickers, t-shirts, backpacks, or even a plushie that, when squeezed, says, "Kupo." They are too busy trying to fulfill that ancient prophecy.

Curious of their legitimacy, I reread the prophecy and realized something: Nowhere does it state the Warriors of Light will save the world; it merely says that four heroes will appear holding a crystal in their hand when the world is veiled in darkness. I have a set of crystal goblets. Maybe once night falls, I will hold one in my hand and claim myself a hero of prophecy! Let's see if I'm treated like a celebrity or a lunatic – I can assume the answer.

The more I see them, the more I consider what might happen if I keep supplying these jerks. If they are truly the heroes of legend, then they are destined to rid the world of all evil, which includes all monsters. Without monsters, there is no need for heroes. If there are no heroes, then no one needs healing items. And where would I be? Out of a job and sitting on a massive stack of hi-potions and tents? Should I switch my specialty or start to sell to the monsters instead?

No. Even with all their annoyances and potential to uproot my dream job, the Warriors of Light have done good for this world. I guess ridding it of darkness, bringing back the winds, calming the seas, and rejuvenating the land are net positives. I can even advertise my shop as having the Warriors of Light favorites. I'll be Crescent Lake's newest claim to fame, the "shop that saved the world." Even if the Warriors of Light saving the world means my way of life will be irrevocably changed, I will continue to supply those four until their quest has ended.

For now, however, I will do my part to save the world one potion sale at a time. Maybe the Circle of Sages will manifest a prophecy about me next. They may even gift *me* a canoe. As long as these heroes are around, that means more gil in my pocket. By supporting the Warriors of Light, I will be the Supplier of Light and be all the richer for it, both literally and figuratively. ◇



A WOMAN IN CHARGE:

Interview With Linda Watson Guillory

by Celeste Roberts

@faeriecrypt

Some people collect PEZ dispensers. Others line their shelves with comic books. *Atlas Obscura* reveals that some folks gather quilts, bells, taxidermy, and other curiosities ("567 Unusual Collections in the United States"). Video-games, though, have caught the eye of serious collectors over the last few years, with determined gaming enthusiasts putting stamp collectors to shame.

One shining example is Linda Watson Guillory of Texas. Her profession is electrical engineering, and her passion is finding electronic treasures and setting Guinness World Records with her collection. At the time of this publication, she is leading the **CHARGE** for the largest collection of playable gaming systems (2,430) and the largest number of LED gaming systems (1,599).

We're thrilled to share Linda's electrifying adventure!

1. What sparked your interest in video-games?

They are fun. What's not to like? Then, you start asking yourself, "How did they do that?" They just draw you in.

2. What kinds of games did you grow up playing?

I started with the old handhelds like TOMY *Digital Derby™ Auto Raceway* (1978) and Conic *Electronic Basketball* (1979). I would have loved a Coleco *Head to Head Football™* (1980), but I only got to see that at school.

My favorite tabletop had to be Coleco *Pac-Man* (1981). Eventually, my sister and I got to play a ColecoVision (1982) when we visited her friend's house, but that was a rare treat. My eldest sister bought me a Commodore 64 (1982) with the tape deck. She bought a few games to go with it, but I mostly remember *Lemonade* (1982). You had to take into account the weather and the amount of supplies you bought, like sugar, to maximize sales. I loved that game. I thought I was the best lemonade salesperson ever. I kept a notebook of the previous conditions, supplies, and sales so that I could constantly improve.

(continued on next page)



But my true second love didn't come until 1985 when my sister brought home a Nintendo Entertainment System (1985) from college. We played all weekend, and I begged her to let me keep it. No chance, but soon, she came home for the summer, and she let me keep the Nintendo in my room. It never left because she officially gave it to me when she returned to college the next semester.

3. You're an electrical engineer by day. Did your interest in video-games light up your career path?

After playing video-games, all I wanted to do was create them. Video-games definitely sparked my interest in electrical engineering. I loved working with my hands and wanted to get an early start, so I took drafting and electronics in high school. Mr. Jagodzinski was the teacher for both classes, and he was one of those teachers who went the extra mile. I learned so much. Can't thank him enough.

I was so ready for the University of Michigan's electronics courses. I couldn't wait. I got there, and I entered CRISP (Computer Registration Involving Student Participation). I found out about these things called "basic courses" and "fundamentals" before I could take my electronics circuits.

My first coding course (Fortran 77) pretty much did me in – not because of the complexity, but because it was so cold in the computer room. Back then, they had to keep the computers super cold. I could not deal. I literally would be in there with my winter coat and gloves, typing in my program. The gloves really made it tough.

After that, I started leaning towards a curriculum where I was not freezing (still electrical engineering but not the game design I envisioned).

4. Do you apply anything you learned from electrical engineering into gaming or repairing systems?

Absolutely. I started taking those games apart when I was a child. As soon as I recognized the components in books, I started paying attention in labs. I remember a lab where we had a break inside one of the wires, so our project was working intermittently. It took hours to find the broken wire. One of the first things I look now for is possible wire breaks and cold solder joints.

Editor's note: A cold solder joint is created when insufficient heat is applied to the filler material; the solder doesn't melt completely, which can lead to cracks and not fully-bonded printed circuit board (PCB) electronic components.

5. When did you begin seriously collecting games and gaming systems?

I started in 2003, but I probably didn't recognize I was a collector until 2005 or so. I thought I was just picking up a few memories from my childhood and seeing if I could still fix them.

6. What kinds of games and systems do you collect?

I started by collecting my first love ... handheld and tabletop games. They are so beautiful. The different shapes, the colors, the music, the artwork. Truly amazing what those designers were doing so early on. I always had a monthly budget for my purchases, and, if I could not find any handhelds I wanted, I would buy the original Nintendo games and play them with my nieces and nephews. Those brought back so many great memories of us playing Nintendo as a family.

7. What are some of the greatest lengths you've taken to build your collection?

LOL, now, you want me to tell my secrets? I can't give up all my secrets. I can tell you this: it all boils down to relationships.

I've traveled all over the world for Texas Instruments, Inc., and I've made friends. I've used these trips as an opportunity to purchase games in person and online. Many years ago, my co-worker set up a Yahoo! JAPAN Auctions account for me that shipped to their residence in Japan, and then, they would bring the games to me during business trips.

This was before Google Translate, so I learned enough Japanese to get me what I needed. Now, with Buyee Japan, I can ship directly to the USA, but I was getting games from Japan when most collectors didn't have that avenue. I also have a wonderful co-worker in Germany who allows me to ship to his house whenever eBay sellers refuse to ship to the USA. He brings the games whenever he travels to the USA, or he asks a coworker to bring them. I've learned game-related words in about six languages to help in my quest and definitely will not let a language barrier stop me.



8. Have you ever been overcharged for an item, or have you ever caught someone overcharging you for an item?

I felt so stupid when I started collecting. I was severely overcharged a couple times to only later have other collectors tell me, "Oh, yeah, he does that to the new collectors." That made me feel even more stupid, especially if I asked their opinion beforehand, and then, they told me after the deal because they didn't want to upset the seller. Don't get me started on that.

I think that may be why I created a pricing guide for handheld games, *Watson's 2007 - 2008 Price Guide for Vintage Electronic Games* (2006). I didn't want newbies to get scammed. (Not a plug for the book. Please don't buy this. Totally overpriced. Plus, I've updated it since then.) Now, where was I?

Not only was I overcharged, but I would actually have to go through a middleman to get some games from collectors. Once they knew it was for me, the price went up (maybe I had "sucker" written across my forehead). I had a friend buy a game from a collector who tried to charge me three-times the price. To this day, I've never let the collector know that I know.



9. Did you experience any hurdles in game collecting and/or the world records process due to gender?

Honestly, I didn't expect so many hurdles, but I did have a few. I don't know if it was gender, race, or a combination of both. I could talk to people for months, arrange to meet up for a sale of games, and then, everything would break down when they saw me. That's why I tend to think it's more race than gender.

I remember once, I was selling an almost complete set of Sachen NES games (1988-2007), and we agreed to meet at the guy's bank. He would review everything, and, if he wanted them, he would purchase them. My husband insisted on coming when I met him because it was going to be a several thousand-dollars transaction. I made my husband stay in the car, but the buyer still looked like [he thought] he was being set up to be robbed when he saw me.

He stopped smiling. He began sweating, he was fumbling over his words, and his hands were shaking so bad he could not open the boxes. This was not the first time I ran into this, so I pretended not to notice. I just kept talking to him in a slow, even tone, telling him about my love of Nintendo, recapping some of our emails and conversations about his love for the games – just giving him time to recover. He settled down.

We eventually made the deal. He went into the bank and got the money, and I gave him the games. We kept in touch afterwards. Nice guy. I remember this time so clearly because, on the way home, my husband said, "Why don't you just tell them you are Black?" I said, "They never tell me they are white." I remember thinking, "Why does it matter? Can't we all just enjoy playing video-games?"

10. What powered your decision to go for the Guinness World Record?

I always wanted a Guinness World Record as a child. I just thought it would be for the most jumps on a pogo stick or hula hoop. The Guinness World Record was harder than I anticipated. I got lucky. Texas Instruments wrote an article about me and my collection. My boss asked me if my collection was a record. I told him I thought so and how I had applied two years prior for the record but had gotten caught up in the process. He said that he would help me.

We laughed about it, but he said he was serious. He was so excited. Other co-workers said they would help also, and so my stalled attempt started gathering momentum. I believe I had about 13 co-workers, friends, and family members help me. I could not have done it without them. They were truly the amazing ones.

11. What was the process like?

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." Times that try women's souls. Let's just say I made several notes, so that if I ever have to do it again, it will be a piece of cake. I just wish I knew then what I know now. LOL. Once you make every mistake in the book, you learn a lot.

I chose the most economical way of setting the record because I wasn't paying \$12K for an official Guinness World Records adjudicator. The record attempt had to be open to the public. I rented a large room with tables, but I knew it would not be sufficient to spread everything out for the count. So, I purchased several shelving units. I thought I did a good job of calculating the surface area needed, but I was off by a mile: we needed double that amount. I also had tables where visitors could play some of my duplicate games and gave games away for everyone who helped with the record attempt. It was an exhausting day, but, in the end, we had fun.

12. What are your records in?

The largest collection of playable gaming systems (2,430) and the largest number of LED gaming systems (1,599). I've grown the collection since then, but those numbers still make me smile.

13. Do you have any future goals or plans?

My goal has been to get my collection in a museum, but that has not been a smooth process. So, in the meantime, I'm just doing me. Expanding my first love, handhelds, and slowly decreasing my second love, Nintendo cartridges. The Nintendo cartridges are not part of my Guinness World Record, so I'm OK letting some of them go. I also want to keep sharing my love of the games on social media.

14. At the time of this interview, what have you collected recently?

There is a series of mini-arcade games from the early '80s that I've deliberately overlooked because they were so plentiful and were manufactured in slightly different cases, but there were so many small variations. They seemed a bit cookie-cutter to me, so I never collected them all. Now, when I look at them, I see the beauty in their individuality and their sameness. I'm going to try to complete the whole set of all the variations. That will be about 70 different games (if I don't include color variations).

15. What else lights up your life?

Family and true friends are on the top of my list of things that bring me joy. Can't forget traveling to exotic locations. I love that. I'm also working on my own documentary with Zachary Weddington, the executive producer at Rock Steady Media that I met a couple years ago on his *Arcade Dreams* documentary (in post-production at the time of this publication). He is also the director of the documentary, *Viva Amiga: The Story of a Beautiful Machine* (2017).

Over the years, he sent me clips of the [*Arcade Dreams*] documentary, and we talked about his amazing editing skills. One day, I just asked if he could do a documentary for me. The first half came from the footage we previously shot; the remaining footage is scheduled for late September 2024. That brings me so much joy: knowing when I leave this place, there will be video evidence of my presence on this Earth.

I'm also still working on low-price gaming kits to use as teaching aids. That definitely gives me joy. Oh, yeah, I went to my first gaming expo, Retro Expo, in Plano, Texas, this past July. That was awesome! ♦



All photos provided by Linda Watson Guillory

Keep up with Linda's electric journey on *Instagram* (@watsonguillory) and *YouTube* (lindaguillory7802). For more information on *Arcade Dreams*, visit arcadedocumentary.com.



VIDEO-GAMES:

FIGHTING VS. SCREAMING

by Kirby Kruger

My brother and I didn't grow up in a household that had a video-game console. My dad was convinced that if we did, my brother and I would become "addicted" to video-games. This was a totally fair suspicion because it was already true; despite the gaping AV ports in our TV, our household was one of the first on the block to have a family computer (a CD-ROM, in fact, and it ran Windows 95, baby). My dad had purchased this for the family envisioning a future of tech literacy and employability and, basically, to kind of show off to all the neighbors. My mom, formerly a qualified typist (on, like, an actual typewriter), could type 70 words per minute and amazed us as her hands flew over the keyboard. My dad types with two fingers to this day, but he DID teach us how to send emails and change the computer wallpaper.

If you weren't around at this time, you need to understand that there was an acclimation period for people alive in the '90s as computers started becoming commonplace, and it was akin to the apemen ogling the monolith in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). Watching screensavers was hours of entertainment. Moving the mouse around the desktop was a bonafide afternoon activity. Even better was a desktop full of shortcuts to installed programs and games; you could click and drag the icons around the screen and pretend they were little guys running around. I'm not kidding: every child of the '90s dipped their toes into computer literacy by giddily doing shit like this over and over.

Instagram & Threads: @TheBestKirby

Despite spending what amounted to hours and hours of just doing extremely dumb shit on the family computer, my brother and I had pretty strict and regulated computer time, which my dad was in **CHARGE** of. We literally had a table with half-hour blocks we had to color in to book time on the computer, and, if we went over the weekly allotted time we had, it came out of our allowance. (Do kids still get that? We got an actual coin allowance. I can't remember the last time I gave somebody coins for something I wanted.)

Despite his stern insistence on scheduling constructive computer time, our dad didn't seem to mind that my brother and I weren't immediately writing code in C++ or that we had figured out that Windows 95 came pre-installed with something technically forbidden in the household: video-games. Maybe it helped that *Minesweeper* (1992) and *SkiFree* (1991) weren't noisy, blippy *Mario Brothers*-sounding games (1983); they were applications teaching us to use the mouse and keyboard. In our quest for computer literacy it was also, of course, important that we learned how to use the CD-ROM correctly, and, prosperously, Windows 95 usually shipped with a bunch of CDs for you to practice popping out of jewel cases and expertly dropping into the CD tray. One of those CDs was usually a disk full of ... video-game demos.

SkiFree (PC)



Again, there seemed to be no problem with my brother and I playing *Doom95* (1996) or *Al Unser Jr. Arcade Racing* (1995). Obviously, nobody was going to fault us for playing DOS games, either – you had to put command prompts to boot up DOS, so, basically, we weren't playing video-games; we were *being programmers*. Sierra games like *King's Quest* (1984) all required text prompts to advance the game, so we were reading and writing, too. We were basically highly academic *scholars* instead of two snotty kids fighting to have a turn when sitting in the white plastic Spectator Chair (next to the only slightly nicer wheeled office chair) became unbearable.

So, we grew up playing PC games but not console games. And, as our family computer had its graphic cards upgraded and its parts Frankenstein-ed and made more powerful, the kinds of PC-only games we could play slowly started becoming enviable: wacky hospital-management sims like *Theme Hospital* (1997), civilization builders like *Age of Empires* (1997), and, by the year 2000, *The Sims*. It's not like console games were completely alien to us; we had cousins and friends who had Sega Mega Drive (Genesis in the USA, 1988) and Sony's new kid on the block, PlayStation (1994). Games like *Crash Bandicoot* (1996) and *Tekken 3* (1997) were so intuitive that it didn't matter that we weren't the hyper-specialized savants the game's original owners had become from hours of play; we could still keep up. (Or, at least, I learned how to combo Gon's fart move early on and just spammed that repeatedly, much to my friend's annoyance. "It's not even a strong move!" they'd cry, and I'd turn my orange dinosaur around and fart on them.)

Age of Empires (PC)



There were definitely games we yearned to be able to play more selfishly and obsessively than an afternoon at a friend's house would allow: *Crash Bandicoot* and *Spyro the Dragon* (1998) never saw PC ports, although we'd hold our breath and hope for them every time we walked into a computer game store. We DID eventually get *Croc: Legend of the Gobbos* (1997) on PC, and, even though we played the crap out of it, I always deeply resented Croc for being neither Crash nor Spyro.

My brother and I couldn't quite figure out why our dad still wouldn't let us get a PlayStation. The family computer was starting to become a rationed occupation as it became more popular to submit typed and printed essays instead of handwritten chicken scratch, and the whole family started relying on email correspondence more and more.

In December 2006, our dad's weird rule suddenly evaporated, and on Christmas morning, a Sony PlayStation 2 (2000) AND a Nintendo Wii (2006) sat under the tree. My brother and I were floored. What suddenly caused the overnight change of heart? We very quickly realized what it was: a smoke-screen for our parent's dissolving marriage.

My brother and I weren't completely oblivious to what was happening upstairs while we played video-games in the basement, but, hey: for once, we could take charge of the kinds of video-games we'd always actually wanted to play. We tore into *Okami* (2006), *Shadow of the Colossus* (2005), *Kingdom Hearts II* (2005), and *Devil May Cry 3* (2005). *Tekken 4* (2001) was a game we played until we unlocked all the characters and unlocked every feature from *Tekken 1-3* (1994-1997). My brother and I were furiously making up for lost time yearning for permanent PlayStation ownership, playing like we thought it was going to get taken away from us at any moment. Things were obviously changing in our house in a scary and permanent way, and we had no control over them. But kicking everyone's ass as a big goofy brown bear? THAT we could control. And we DID.

It was the first time my brother and I could properly play video-games cooperatively as well – or, at least, where both of us had the same remote control and couldn't accuse each other of having an unfair advantage because "it's harder to play on the left side of the keyboard." We could finally make each other righteously eat shit in versus modes or play games together without it just being one of us screaming advice at the sibling manning the controls at the time.

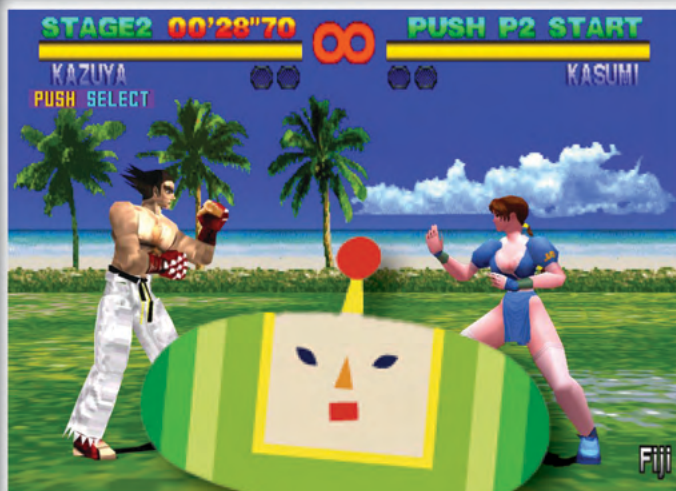
Tekken DID frequently mirror an emotional bruising similar to the video-game carnage we'd unleash on each other, and we'd savagely turn on each other for using the same move combos or repeatedly choosing characters who were unfairly strong. (I was banned from playing Yoshimitsu, and my brother was banned from playing Jin.) So, *Tekken* eventually needed to be demoted to a single-player game for the sake of our precarious friendship as siblings who held the keys to being able to emotionally destroy each other at the drop of a hat in a time when we really needed each other.

There was, however, another game disc in our little fabric CD-case that we'd initially overlooked which became the perfect player-vs-player game for us: *Katamari Damacy* (2004).

This game was insane. Still is – you can still play it on Switch (2018) or PSP (2005) (or, I mean, nothing's stopping you from playing it on the original PS2). There are actually six sequels out to date, and, while they each have their little unique flairs, they are fundamentally the same game. The concept is that you're a little guy rolling up stuff in a ball to make a dense star – except it's maybe a little more nefarious than that. You start off tiny, but as your little dung beetle ball gets bigger, you start being able to roll up bigger things. What starts off as you innocently mopping up push-pins and paperclips off a messy office floor moves to you rolling up unsuspecting mice, cats, children, and entire streets full of stuff, but the kerosene to this game's flame is the timer and the soundtrack by Yuu Miyake. The internet hasn't been quiet about the impact of this bombastic track – it won *IGN* and *GameSpot's* "Soundtrack of the Year 2004" awards, and most game reviews start off talking about the music. In fact, there are many articles dedicated to understanding the anatomy of this deeply weird, frantically layered functional cacophony. The game is not particularly demanding in terms of thinking about strategy and developing skill – if you've used analog sticks on a PS2 controller, you've got it already – but the game kind of puts you into *A Clockwork Orange* (1961) torture headgear the second the level starts and the proverbial needle hits the track.

This was a game my brother and I could play together and reliably remain friends afterwards. If you play two-player, you split-screen and race to build the biggest ball against the timer (which is a very peeled-back way of describing three minutes of unblinking, button-bashing, analogue-stick-twisting insanity). This is a game that, to this day, still feels the most like a "game" to me, which is my brother and I shrieking "Na-na-naaaah" along to the theme song and then just shrieking as the timer starts running out and both of our katamaris (the, uh, actual ball you're rolling around) are still underperforming.

Tekken (PS1)



Katamari Damacy_1 (PS2)



Katamari Damacy is a weird, charge-ahead-and-just-play game that was something my brother and I needed to be able to play together at a time when our teenage brains were climbing out of the primordial bog that was childhood and into the arguably grosser quagmire that was underdeveloped frontal lobe adolescence. Competition we could slot into without taking it personally. It was an escape from family life that didn't look like beating each other up in video-games — it was an escape that just asked us to charge ahead and scream with manic laughter.

And “charge” is a great one-word description for *Katamari Damacy*: all the game asks you to do is to rush forward as quickly as possible without giving what you're rolling up too much thought. I love this game because it has maintained a very serious silliness that still doesn't feel old or tired to me. Nothing REALLY ages perfectly, but in an age where we're all seeking dopamine hits from nostalgia, genuine or manufactured, this one really does manage to take me back and fully arrest my inner child's attention and delight. I do know it's not due to particularly genius game design; the nostalgia is served with afternotes of melancholy and the quietly foreboding sense of the sun setting on our childhood.

Katamari Damacy_3 (PS2)



I'm not saying that video-games helped us take charge of our lives. That would, unfortunately, only come with time (trying and failing, trying and succeeding). It's important you understand that I don't think video-games taught me that. But they were a bookmark in an important transitional time of my and my brother's lives, and it's valuable to be able to review that chapter as adults today. Today, we're grown-ups who live in different countries, go to therapy, exercise, and practice mindfulness. Back then — well, we had a basement with video-games and each other. ♦

CHARGING into BATTLE

ON A HOPE AND A PAIR OF DOUBLE-A BATTERIES

by Kyle Kubik

☎ oneradtee.com | ☎ oneradpodcast.com

You stand on a hellish battlefield, shoulder to shoulder with your comrades, surrounded by lava and scorched rock. Your ragtag squadron represents the last hope of the Cypress Kingdom against an all-consuming threat led by the malevolent deity, Iom. Countless skeletons, golems, and zombies lie slain in your wake as you and your allies approach what may be your final, decisive battle.

Chester and Graham, two archers in your group of skilled rangers, swiftly dispatch Iom's minions: gargoyle-like creatures he calls "dolls." Meanwhile, May and Sarah, your team's clerics, provide crucial support with their proficient spellcasting. A path clears ahead, guiding you and Nick, the prince of Cypress, toward the climactic point where you'll deliver the decisive blow to Iom.

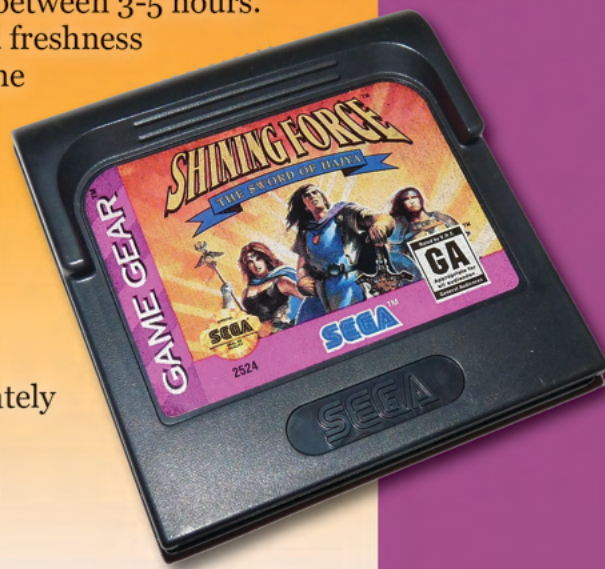
You raise your sword, locking eyes with the demon king's glowing, otherworldly gaze. As you move to strike, suddenly — darkness descends. The vibrant red glow of the lava fades to black. Silence falls. Nothing remains. You and your party have not fallen to Iom's hand, but to a different adversary — six depleted batteries inside your Sega Game Gear (1990).



5. Highlighted below – Please add an apostrophe at the end after the "s" so it's possessive - parents'

The above scenario is something very close to what I experienced while playing *Shining Force: The Sword of Hajya* (1993) on my Sega Game Gear in the mid-nineties, albeit not at the final battle but somewhere in the middle of the game. I lost what progress I had made and had to start from an earlier save file after I fished a mismatching set of six AA batteries from my parents' junk drawer. It was a discouraging event that happened all too often when gaming on the Game Gear. Damien Kapa, in his article on the console that appeared in *Retro Gamer* # 17 (volume 2, issue 5), wrote that the battery life for the Game Gear was somewhere between 3-5 hours. I imagine the window of game time greatly depended on the brand and freshness of the batteries being sent to their expedited death in the back of a Game Gear.

According to *HowLongToBeat.com*, the main story of *Shining Force: The Sword of Hajya* takes about 15.5 hours to complete (18 hours for completionists). Based on *Retro Gamer*'s estimates, finishing the game could require between 18 to 30 AA batteries. In 1995, a 4-pack of RadioShack AA alkaline batteries cost \$2.99 USD + tax. Using that price, it would have cost a player (or their parent/guardian) approximately \$13.46 to \$22.43 USD + tax in batteries to complete the game.

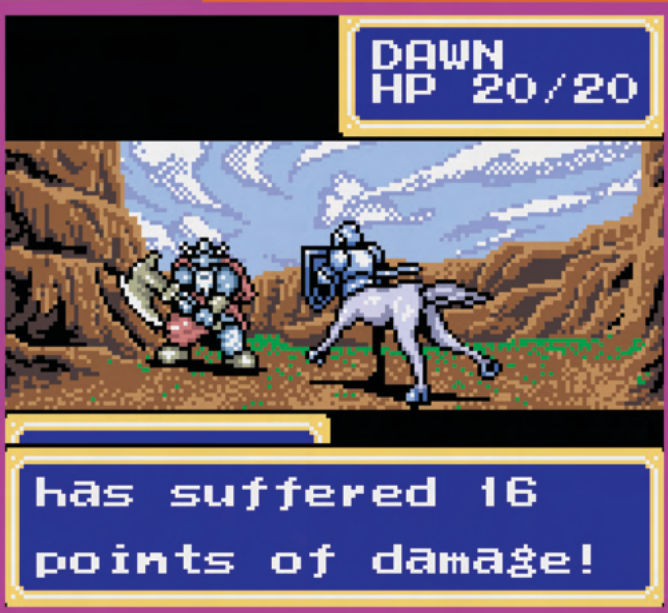


Considering that the average Game Gear game cost between \$31.99 and \$49.99 USD + tax, completing *Shining Force: The Sword of Hajya* on batteries alone would have cost roughly half the price of a new game. Talk about “an additional **CHARGE** may apply” — playing the Game Gear exclusively on batteries not only reduced gameplay time but also put a dent in your (or your parent’s) wallet.

Now, let’s compare this to the Nintendo Game Boy (1989) using *The Legend of Zelda: Link’s Awakening* (1993) as an example. *HowLongToBeat.com* reports that this game takes around 15 hours to complete. The Game Boy, which requires 4 AA batteries with an estimated 10 to 15 hours of battery life, would run the player between \$2.99 and \$5.98 USD + tax in batteries. In 1996, the savings would improve even further with the release of the Game Boy Pocket, which only requires 2 AAA batteries and provides around 10 hours of playtime. By comparison, the Sega Game Gear was discontinued just a year later in 1997.

To make the most of the Sega Game Gear and its library without spending hundreds of dollars on batteries, players would have been wise to invest in the Sega Game Gear Power Adapter, which cost \$19.99 USD + tax — equivalent to nearly five sets of batteries. However, tethering

the Game Gear to a wall made it about as portable as a Vectrex (1982). Perhaps this limitation is why Sega ported many Game Gear titles to the Sega Master System (1985), a traditional home console, as the two systems share almost identical architecture. However, something different — and arguably better — was in store for *Shining Force: The Sword of Hajya* and its Japanese-only predecessor, *Shining Force Gaiden: Ensei – Jashin no Kuni he* (1992). Both tactical RPGs were remade and combined in 1995 as *Shining Force CD* for the Sega CD (1991), another expensive piece of hardware that requires a Sega Genesis (1988) to use. I won’t dive into even more “1995 Alkaline Battery Math,” but the low-end cost to play *Shining Force CD* in 1995 was approximately \$210.00 USD + tax (about 280 AA batteries), assuming the player didn’t already own some of the necessary hardware. To put that into perspective, the Sega Saturn was also released that same year with a price tag of \$399.99 USD + tax.



Let’s revisit *Shining Force*. When compared to other franchises in its genre, such as *Fire Emblem* (1990) or *Final Fantasy Tactics* (1997), the *Shining Force* series has a smaller yet passionate fanbase. For many Sega Genesis owners, *Shining Force* (1992) and *Shining Force II* (1993) were their first experiences with tactical role-playing games. However, due to the lower install base of the Sega Game Gear and Sega CD, it’s understandable why many American gamers are more familiar with the first two home console entries I mention rather than the handheld and Sega CD versions. With that being said, *Shining Force CD* is the best way to experience the first two Game Gear titles if you haven’t already. If you’re looking to dive deeper into the series, there’s even an English translation patch for the third, Japan-only Game Gear release, *Shining Force Gaiden: Final Conflict* (1995), which also ties directly into the story of the first two home console entries.

Looking back, it’s easy to poke fun at Sega’s missteps — whether it is the amount of batteries required to play Game Gear games or the array of hardware peripherals they released for the Genesis, which could be cobbled together to form the infamous “Tower of Power.” However, Sega was in a fierce battle with its competitors. While Sega was a leading arcade company, it struggled to break into the home console market. The SG-1000 (1983) and Sega Mark III (1985), known as the Sega Master System in North America, didn’t make a big impact. In 1988, Sega

released the Genesis (known as the Mega Drive in Japan) to compete with Nintendo's Famicom from 1983 (NES in the U.S.), aiming to bring the late 1980s arcade experience into homes. For two years, it succeeded. But in 1990 (1991 in the U.S.), Nintendo launched the Super Famicom (Super Nintendo in the U.S.), catching Sega off-guard.

With hardware that was only two years old (**and their third hardware release in just five years**), what hope did Sega have to triumph in this budding console war? Like the heroes of *Shining Force*, they fought back against their threats. They equipped new “weapons” — like 1992's Sega CD and 1994's 32X — to challenge Nintendo's 16-bit powerhouse. Despite the odds, Sega won the battle in America for four consecutive years, outselling the Super Nintendo. However, unlike the wars fought in *Shining Force*, the “console war” had no true end, and, with their multiple hardware platforms, Sega was spread too thin. While the Game Gear's heavy battery consumption certainly didn't help, it likely was not the biggest albatross around its neck. Nintendo, with their Game Boy, held most third-party developers with exclusive contracts, limiting the number and quality of titles that could appear on Sega's handheld. As a result, Sega was on their own to fill the void in their game library, something they also had to do with the Genesis, Sega CD, and 32X almost simultaneously. So, while the Game Gear may have boasted more *Sonic* titles than the Game Boy had *Mario* titles, Nintendo had marquee names like *Tetris* (1989), *Castlevania: The Adventure* (1989), and *The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening* (1993) on their side, while Sega countered with games like *Columns* (1990), *Vampire: Master of Darkness* (1992), and *Defenders of Oasis* (1992). And while Sega's offerings may have been great or even better in their own right, they couldn't compete against Nintendo's brand recognition.

Shining Force: The Sword of Hajya (and all this silly “battery math” above) is a microcosm for the video-game industry in the early to mid-1990s. It was a battle over bits, a chase to create an arcade experience at home and a home console experience on the go. It was a charge to push the available technology to its limits, whether the technology or the consumer was ready for it or not. For all the goofy choices Sega made that we retrospectively joke about, they successfully delivered on many of their ambitions. If the Sega Game Gear is — for all intents and purposes — a portable version of a home console (the Sega Master System), then *Shining Force: The Sword of Hajya* puts the home console experiences of *Shining Force* and *Shining Force II* in your pocket. It just might have cost you over \$20 in batteries to get through it. And, yes, I did finally have enough battery power to beat *Shining Force: The Sword of Hajya*. Sadly, in this case, the best hope I had for victory against Iom was leading Sega's *Shining Force* on the back of, ironically, a Nintendo handheld some 18 years later in 2013 when it was released on the Nintendo 3DS XL (2012) eShop. This is a system that has 3.5 to 10 hours of battery life — depending on the software being played — on a single charge, a significantly better conduit for rescuing the Cypress Kingdom. ◇



COMING WINTER/SPRING 2025
READ ONLY MAGAZINE #11: FRIEND



11

