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Sealed Games

Is that factory? (Part 2)

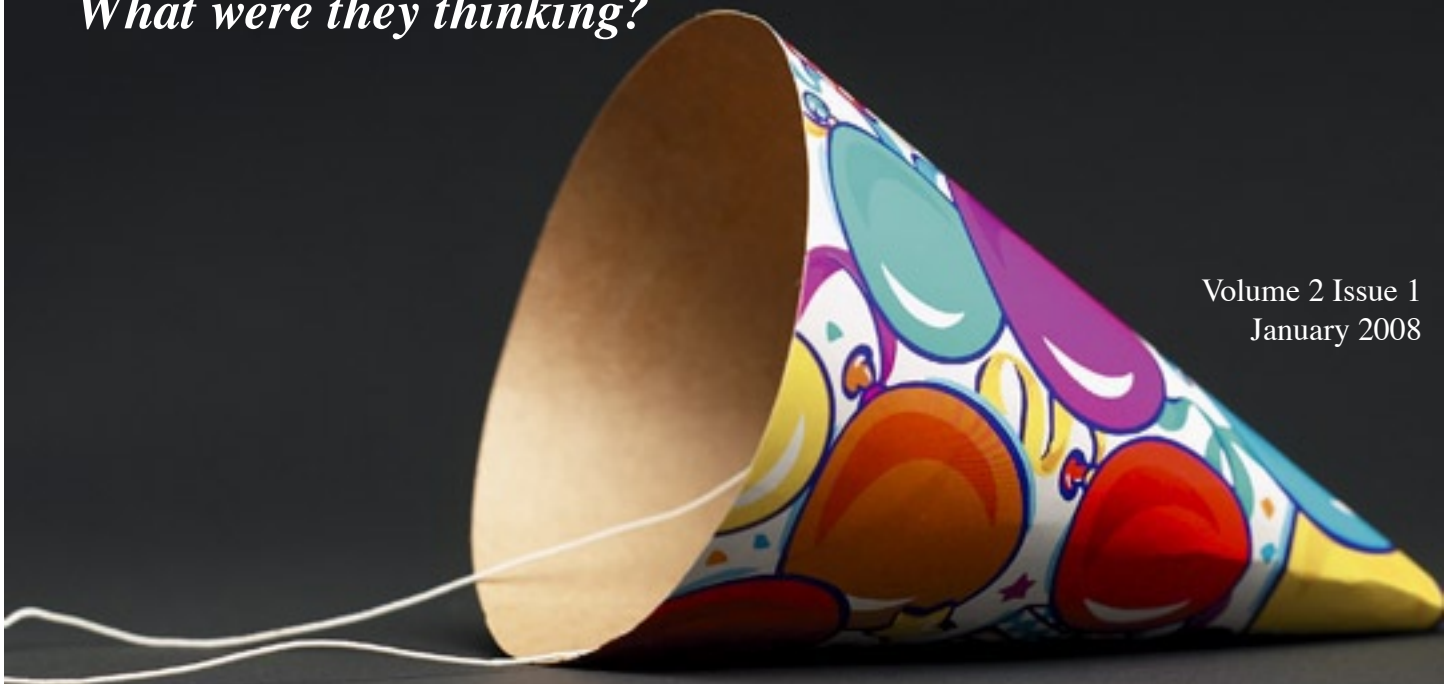
Reproductions

A step-by-step guide

Active Enterprises, Inc.

What were they thinking?

Volume 2 Issue 1
January 2008



(happy new year)



Making Reproduction Carts: Earthbound and California Raisins Step-by-Step

Article by Mark Lacey

A lot of people would like to know how to make their own game reproductions and hopefully this tutorial will help get you started. I'm going to cover 2 games, Earthbound, which requires a donor cart, and California Raisins, for which we will use one of RetroUSB's ReproPak.



Teaching you how to solder, de-solder, and use an EPROM programmer are beyond the scope of this tutorial, so I will not spend much time discussing such things. There are tutorials elsewhere on the internet that can better explain them. One of the best tips I can give you if you're new to soldering and de-soldering is to practice on old electronic junk!

Some of the tools and supplies required for both repro carts we are making:

- Soldering Iron
- Solder supplies: solder, flux, etc
- Security Bit for opening carts
- EPROM programmer
- Multi-meter (optional, but recommended)

Let's jump right into Earthbound. Here are more things you will need that are specific to this repro:

- De-soldering Iron and/or De-soldering Braid
- Small gauge wire (I use 28 gauge solid wire)
- Electrical Tape
- Suitable Donor Cart (NES-TKROM)
- New CR2032 Battery & Clip (optional)
- 2 x 27C2001 EPROMs (256KB)

Check this list for all USA carts that use TK-ROM: <http://bootgod.dyndns.org:7777/search.php?pcb=TKROM&country=USA>

The board NES-TSROM can also be used, but additional modifications must be made in order to add battery support. Once you've found a donor cart, first make sure it has good contacts. Clean them as necessary and try your donor out in your NES to make sure it's not going to give you problems. It would be a shame if

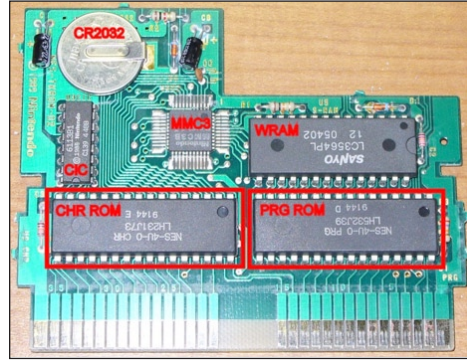
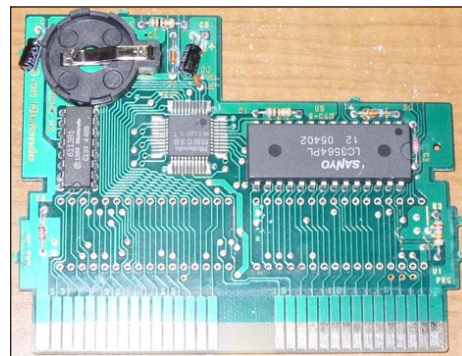
you were to go thru all this work only to have it not work because of crappy contacts! I will be using a Tecmo Super Bowl cart for this tutorial. See picture to the right for parts layout.

First thing we need to do is de-solder the PRG and CHR ROMs. The de-soldering iron I use is from Radio Shack and costs about \$10. You de-solder chips from the back side of the board. I'll give you a few pointers to make this easier.

- Make sure the iron is good and hot before you start. Give it about 5 minutes.
- Sometimes all of the solder won't come out. In those cases, re-solder the joint and try again. Pins that are connected to large planes on the board like power and ground are typically more stubborn.
- After you've done all the pins, hold the board in front of a light and make sure you can see thru all holes.
- Once it looks ready, I also find it helps to flip the board back over, and then take your regular soldering iron (heated, of course), and push the tip against each pin. This will pop the pin away from the edge of the hole, as often there will be a little solder left causing it to stick.

If you've done all this, the ROMs should pop out pretty easily. Slide a wide, flat tool (screwdriver, etc.) underneath the ROM from the side and gently pry it up. Don't force it under the chip, as you don't want to accidentally cut any traces on the board under the ROM. If it's not popping out easily, double check the all solder has been removed from the pins. If you force it too hard, you could break the pins off the ROM (which in this case wouldn't matter) or worse, you could rip the metal ring from the hole out of the board! This can be fixed, but it is a pain. Basically what you'd need to do in this case is solder a small piece wire directly to the pin of the ROM, and jump it over to an attachable point where the trace leads to.

If all went well your board should now look like this:



Note that I went ahead and replaced the battery with a holder. I would recommend you replace yours as well, even if the original still works, because it probably won't much longer! This procedure has been covered in a previous issue so I won't go over it again.

A quick word on a chip's pin orientation: Pin 1 is identified by a round dot in the corner of the chip and/or by a notch in one side of the chip. Pins are counted counter-clockwise from pin 1 like so:



Let's take a break and program our EPROM's. First you'll need to find an Earthbound ROM. If you don't have one, you should be able to find one pretty easy by searching Google. There are a couple different versions of this ROM out there. I used the original, un-hacked ROM from a prototype but you could also use the Neo-Demiforce hack which basically just changes the title screen to say "Earthbound Zero".

Next we need to split the .nes file into its PRG and CHR components. There are a number of programs that can do this or you can do it manually in a hex editor if you know how. Just for example, you can use the CopyNESW software. Even if you don't have a CopyNES, you can still use some functions of the software. The one you want to use is "Split .NES" Now you're ready to program the EPROM's. If you don't have a programmer, probably the cheapest one you can get is the Willem brand. You can find these at <http://www.sivava.com> Note that it uses a parallel port for programming, a lot of new computers don't have one anymore, so keep that in mind.

These programmers look complicated but the software tells you how to set everything. Assuming you're using one of these programmers and its software, first select to proper device by going to Device -> EPROM -> 27Cxxx -> 27C020/2000/2001. Set up all jumpers and DIP switches exactly as pictured in the software. Next go to File -> Load and select your PRG file from before. Insert your blank EPROM (make sure it's in the correct direction) and then select Action -> Program. It will take a minute to program and verify the data.

If everything went well, open up your CHR file, insert your other EPROM and program it. Label each EPROM so you don't get them mixed up when installing. If you want to be on the safe side, cover the EPROM windows to block them from UV light exposure, which will erase them.

Unfortunately you can't simply solder these EPROM's right back in because their pin-out is a little different than the ROM's you took out. So we'll need to do some re-routing. First thing we need to do is put electrical tape over the pin holes of the pins that need to be changed. On the PRG side, cut small pieces of tape and cover holes 1, 2, 24, 30, & 31. On the CHR side, cover holes 1, 2, 22, 24, 30, 31. (Example, right).

Now carefully bend up the same pins you

just covered with each EPROM and then carefully insert them in place. Go ahead and solder all the pins that still go thru the holes. Now we'll do the re-wiring. When it says to connect a pin to hole, you attach to the hole from the backside of the board. The tape is there to prevent the solder from re-attaching to the pin on the front side.

PRG rewiring:

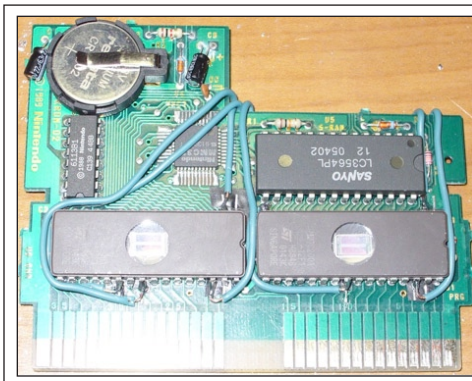
- Connect pin 2 to hole 24
- Connect pin 24 to pin 16
- Connect pin 30 to hole 1
- Pins 1 & 31 will remain unconnected in this case

CHR rewiring:

- Connect pin 2 to hole 24
- Connect pin 22 to hole 31
- Connect pin 24 to hole 2
- Connect pin 30 to hole 1
- Again, pins 1 & 31 are not used

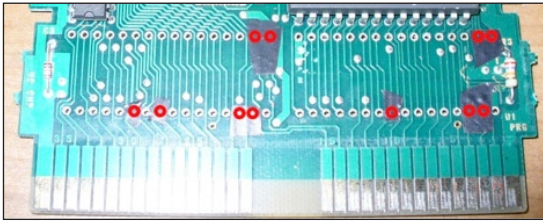
Once you've done all that, your board should look something like the example below.

Now it wouldn't hurt to check your connections with a multi-meter. Make sure all



your solder joints are good and that nothing is shorting to anything it shouldn't be. If it looks good, put your cart back together and test it out!

Now before we go on with our next repro, I'd like to explain how it is determined which pins have to be re-routed to where. It changes depending on the size of the EPROM and the ROM it's replacing, so you'll need to know this if you want to try your hand on something else! If the ROM size is 32KB or less, no rewiring is required, you can just de-solder the old ROM and solder in the EPROM. If it's larger, you'll need to look at a pin-out of both the



ROM you're replacing and the EPROM and look for pins that don't match up. Pin 1 of an EPROM is always "VPP" which is the programming voltage and is only used

when programming the chip, so it never needs to be connected when used on a cart. In this case, pin 31 is also only used when programming which is why it didn't have to be connected either. You can find a lot of this information at <http://nesdev.parodius.com> - search for "ROM pinouts".

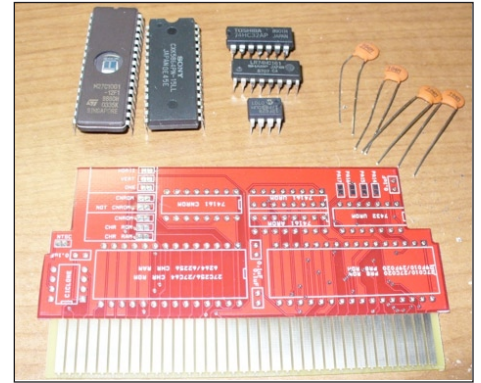
Let's move on to California Raisins. This time, instead of a donor cart, we're going to use a ReproPak. As you will see, using them is much, much easier!

Parts needed:

- ReproPak PCB
- 27C1001 EPROM (128KB)
- 6264 RAM (8KB)
- 74HC32
- 74HC161
- CIClone
- 4 x 0.1uF capacitors
- Cart shell

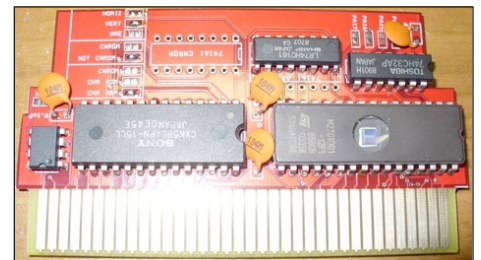
All of these parts are available from RetroUSB.com. Any chips you buy from there will also come with a 0.1uF capacitor (see top right).

First program your EPROM with the



PRG data from California Raisins. This game does not have a CHR ROM and uses CHR RAM instead, so you only need to program the one EPROM. The ReproPak PCB pretty well explains itself. Basically you just solder in all the chips, capacitors, and a few jumpers on the board.

First, install all the chips. Remember to line the notches on the chips to the ones drawn on the board. The EPROM goes into bottom-right, the RAM goes to its left. The CIClone goes to where it says CIClone. California Raisins uses the board NES-UNROM, so we'll use the spots marked "UROM" on the board. The 74HC32 goes to the top-right and finally the 74HC161 will go into the top-middle, using the first and third rows. Now for the jumpers, the 4 in top-right corner marked "PA1x" are not used for this configuration. The one marked "NTSC" over by the CIClone will lock into that region, this shouldn't be necessary so leave it alone. This game uses vertical mirroring, so set that jumper by soldering across the 2 small pads. In the next box down, set the "NOT CNROM" jumper. Finally, in the box below that, set the "CHR RAM" jumper. Now install the capacitors, this type doesn't have polarity, so it doesn't matter which way you put them in. Normally you wouldn't use capacitors with as large a form as the ones shown in the pic, but it's all I had handy!



The ReproPak and ReproPak MMC1 manuals on RetroUSB.com explain how to set-up each type of configuration quite well.

Hopefully this tutorial has given you some insight on how to go about doing other repros. Some other tidbits that might help are listed on the next page.

- To help determine which board you might need to use for a game, open up the ROM in an emulator like Nestopia. Once opened, go to Options -> Image Info. This will tell you various aspects about the ROM like the mapper, mirroring, ROM sizes, sometimes even the actual board. If you look at Final Fantasy II for instance, it uses mapper 1, which is MMC1 based boards. SNROM to be precise. So you have 2 options here, either ReproPak MMC1 or donor.
- To help find what carts can be used as donors,

you can use the advanced search on my site. Using FF2 as an example again, enter "SNROM" for the PCB, set Battery to "Yes" as this game needs a battery, and set region to "USA" if you want to restrict results to US carts.

- You can use larger EPROM's than a game requires, if that's all you have on hand for instance. Just be sure to duplicate the data to fill out the entire EPROM. For instance if you have a 128K ROM, but only have a 256K EPROM, you'll want to "mirror" to the upper 128K as well.

An easy way to do this is from the command prompt: copy /b 128game.rom + 128game.rom 256game.rom

- If you're having trouble figuring anything out, don't hesitate to ask help! Post your question in "The Brewery" and someone is sure to try to lend a hand.

Well that's all for now, maybe in a future issue we can tackle some more complex examples like Final Fantasy III!

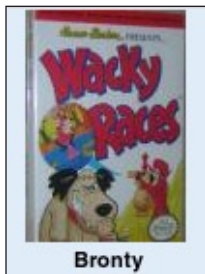


How was it sealed?

(Part 2)

Article by Dan Maresca

[In this issue, Dan continues his documentation of NES game seals. Please keep in mind that sealing variants exist and that this list is bound to evolve as new information is uncovered. A few titles have been left off the list until such time as they can be verified.]



I started to touch on manufacturers last time, noting that late issue LJN/Acclaim titles were sealed with the vertical overlap seam.

With respect to licensed titles, the manufacturer is probably the easiest rule of thumb in determining whether or not the standard horizontal seam would be present. In terms of companies that manufactured licensed titles, really the only publishers that potentially deviated from the horizontal seam standard on games released in standard size boxes were: LJN, acclaim, Hi-tech, Namco, Sunsoft and possibly Virgin's Overlord

(verification still needed). Odd-size boxes such as Stack-up, Arkanoid, Miracle Piano, and Carmen Sandiego are another anomaly altogether and none of these were sealed with the horizontal seam. The same is true for the Family Fun Fitness variant of Athletic World, since was a pack-in released within an oversize accessory set box.

Any standard size USA box from these publishers was released with the common horizontal seam:

SNK, Taito, Bandai, Data East, Konami, Broderbund, FCI, Capcom, Nintendo, Tecmo, Jaleco, Tradewest, Ultra, Meldac, Irem, Tokai, Gametek, Hudson, HAL, Seika, Mindscape, Seta, Sammy, Mattel, Hot-B, Milton Bradley, Sofel, Nexoft, Romstar, Taxan, Culture Brain, Square, Koei, CBS Imagesoft, Absolute, JVC, Toho, Asmik, Enix, Parker Bros, Bullet Proof, Electro Brain, NTVIC, Electronic Arts, Infocom, Triffix, Ocean, Atlus, THQ, INTV, Natsume, Titus, American Technos, Microprose, Activision, Matchbox, American Softworks, ASCII, Ubi Soft, or Kemco.



dian NTSC variants? These were sealed without wrap, simply with black circular foil stickers that said 'Nintendo' across them. The stickers were placed along the top edge of the box such that the game box could not be opened without removing the sticker. These Canadian variants are fun collectibles and rarely seen compared to their US counterparts. Finding them sealed at all, let alone in decent condition is especially challenging given the fact that they were manufactured without the protective wrapping which

stayed a large part of the shelf wear on the US versions.

Next month, some words on unlicensed publishers.

Part 2 of the seal chart follows. As always, some omissions have been made until such time as I can verify my copies.



So, for US licensed titles, that's really it in a nutshell, it's just that simple.... There are just a handful of 'exception' publishers to watch out for.

Speaking of exceptions, Tengen started out as a licensed manufacturer with Pacman, RBI Baseball, and Gauntlet. The licensed versions of these games do come with the horizontal seam. The unlicensed versions of these games, along with the remainder of Tengen's output (as they were unlicensed from that point forward) were not sealed with the horizontal seam.

So we've talked about the US titles, but what about the Cana-

ADDITIONAL NOTES

- Death Race** - All copies I've seen have a contest sticker on the plastic
- Genghis Khan** - Step seam version also confirmed
- Indiana / Doom / Tengen** - Possible LBT flatback version?

Nintendo NES Factory Release Info Letters D-K

Legend:

Flatback – No horizontal or vertical seam.

L – Left Seam **B** – Bottom Seam

R – Right Seam **T** – Top Seam

Dance Aerobics	Horizontal	Faxanadu	Horizontal	Home Alone	Horizontal
Danny Sullivan's Indy Heat	Horizontal	Felix the Cat	Horizontal	Home Alone 2	Horizontal
Darkman	Horizontal	Ferrari Grand Prix	Horizontal	Hook	Horizontal
Darkwing Duck	Horizontal	Fester's Quest	Horizontal	Hoops	Horizontal
Dash Galaxy	Horizontal	Final Fantasy	Horizontal	Hot Slots	B Flatback
Day Dreamin' Davey	Horizontal	Fire n Ice	Horizontal	Hudson Hawk	Horizontal
Days of Thunder	LRB / Flatback	Fisher Price: I Can Remember	Horizontal	Hydlide	Horizontal
Deadly Towers	Horizontal	Fisher Price: Firehouse Rescue	Horizontal	Ice Climber	Horizontal
Deathbots	TBR Flatback	Fisher Price: Perfect Fit	Horizontal	Ice Hockey	Horizontal
Death Race	TBR Flatback	Fist of the North Star	Horizontal	Ikari Warriors	Horizontal
Defender 2	Horizontal	Flight of the Intruder	Horizontal	Ikari Warriors 2	Horizontal
Defender of the Crown	Horizontal	Flintstones	Horizontal	Ikari Warriors 3	Horizontal
Defenders of Dynatron City	Horizontal	Flintstones 2 Dino Peak	Horizontal	Image Fight	Horizontal
Déjà Vu	Horizontal	Flying Dragon (both red and white boxes)	Horizontal	Immortal	Horizontal
Demon Sword	Horizontal	Flying Warriors	Horizontal	Impossible Mission 2 (SEI)	LR Hor. Overlap
Desert Commander	Horizontal	Formula One: Built to Win	Horizontal	Incredible Crash Test Dummies	Horizontal
Destination Earthstar	Horizontal	Frankenstein	Horizontal	Indiana Jones & the Last Crusade	Horizontal
Destiny of an Emperor	Horizontal	Freedom Force	Horizontal	(Taito)	
Dick Tracy	Horizontal	Friday the 13th	Horizontal	Indiana Jones & the Last Crusade	Horizontal
Die Hard	Horizontal	Fun House	Horizontal	(Ubisoft)	
Dig Dug 2	Horizontal	Galaga	Horizontal	Indiana Jones & the Temple of Doom	TBR Flatback
Digger T Rock	Horizontal	Galactic Crusader	LRB Flatback	(Tengen)	
Dirty Harry	Horizontal	Galaxy 5000	Horizontal	Indiana Jones & the Temple of Doom	Horizontal
Disney's Adv./Magic Kingdom	Horizontal	Gargoyle's Quest 2	Horizontal	(Mindscape)	
Dizzy	LRB Flatback	Gauntlet (licensed)	Horizontal	Iron Tank	Horizontal
Donkey Kong	Horizontal	Gauntlet (unlicensed)	LBT Flatback	Isolated Warrior	Horizontal
Donkey Kong Classics	Horizontal	Gauntlet 2	Horizontal	Jackal horizontal	Horizontal
Donkey Kong Jr.	Horizontal	Gemfire	Horizontal	Jackie Chan's Action Kung Fu	Horizontal
Donkey Kong 3	Horizontal	Genghis Khan	Horizontal	Jack Nicklaus Golf	Horizontal
Donkey Kong Jr. Math	Horizontal	Ghoul School	Horizontal	James Bond Jr	Horizontal
Double Dare	Horizontal	Ghostbusters	Horizontal	Jaws	Horizontal
Double Dragon	Horizontal	Ghostbusters 2	Horizontal	Jeopardy	Horizontal
Double Dragon 2	Horizontal	Ghost Lion	Horizontal	Jeopardy 25th	Horizontal
Double Dragon 3	Horizontal	Ghosts n Goblins	Horizontal	Jeopardy Jr.	Horizontal
Double Dribble	Horizontal	Gilligan's Island	Horizontal	Jetsons	Horizontal
Dr Chaos	Horizontal	GI Joe: ARAH	Horizontal	Jimmy Connors Tennis	Horizontal
Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde	Horizontal	GI Joe: Atlantis Factor	Horizontal	Joe & Mac	Horizontal
Dr. Mario	Horizontal	Goal	Horizontal	Jordan v Bird	Horizontal
Dracula	Horizontal	Goal 2	Horizontal	Joshua	LRB Flatback
Dragon Fighter	Horizontal	Godzilla	Horizontal	Journey to Silius	Horizontal
Dragon Power	Horizontal	Godzilla 2	Horizontal	Joust	Horizontal
Dragon Spirit	Horizontal	Gold Medal Challenge 92	Horizontal	Jungle Book	Horizontal
Dragon Warrior	Horizontal	Golf	Horizontal	Karate Champ	Horizontal
Dragon Warrior 2	Horizontal	Golf Grand Slam	Horizontal	Karate Kid	Horizontal
Dragon Warrior 3	Horizontal	Golf Power (Greg Norman)	Horizontal	Karnov	Horizontal
Dragon Warrior 4	Horizontal	Golgo 13	Horizontal	Kickle Cubicle	Horizontal
Dragon's Lair	Horizontal	Goonies 2	Horizontal	Kickmaster	Horizontal
Duck Hunt	Horizontal	Gotcha!	Horizontal	Kid Icarus	Horizontal
Ducktales	Horizontal	Gradius	Horizontal	Kid Klown	Horizontal
Ducktales 2	Horizontal	Great Waldo Search	Horizontal	Kid Kool	Horizontal
Dudes with Attitude	TBR Flatback	Gremlins 2	Horizontal	Kid Niki	Horizontal
Dungeon Magic	Horizontal	Gumshoe	Horizontal	King's Knight	Horizontal
Dusty Diamond Softball	Horizontal	Guardian Legend	Horizontal	King Neptune's Adventure	LRB Flatback
Dynowarz	Horizontal	Guerrilla War	Horizontal	King of Kings	LRB Flatback
Elevator Action	Horizontal	Gun Nac	Horizontal	Kings of the Beach	Horizontal
Eliminator Boat Duel	Horizontal	Gunsmoke (both versions)	Horizontal	King's Quest 5	Horizontal
Evert/Lendl Tennis	Horizontal	Gyromite	Horizontal	Kirby's Adventure	Horizontal
Excitebike	Horizontal	Gyruss	Horizontal	Kiwi Kraze	Horizontal
Exodus	LRT Flatback	Harlem Globetrotters	Horizontal	Klash Ball	Horizontal
F-15 City War	TBR Flatback	Hatris	Horizontal	Knight Rider	Horizontal
F-15 Strike Eagle	Horizontal	Heavy Barrel	Horizontal	KO boxing (George Foreman)	Ver. Overlap
F-117A Stealth	Horizontal	Heavy Shreddin'	Horizontal	Krazy Creatures	TBR Flatback
Family Feud	Horizontal	High Speed (Pinball)	Horizontal	Krion Conquest, The	Horizontal
Fantasy Zone	Vertical Overlap	Hogan's Alley	Horizontal	Kung Fu (US)	Horizontal
Faria	Horizontal	Hollywood Squares (both)	Horizontal	Kung Fu Heroes	Horizontal
Fast Break (Magic Johnson)	Horizontal			Krusty's Fun House	Horizontal



Active Entertainment

Article by Jason Smith

Active Enterprises is one of the quirkiest game companies in NES history. Active (AE) was founded in 1989 by Raul Gomila and Vince Perry in Florida. The company started with the intent of making gaming cheaper for everyone. Their original concept was to have multiple NES games on one cartridge, to lower the cost-per-game to the consumer. This was a big deal in the early 90's because this was before pirate companies had begun to make and market their own cheap multicarts.



AE had very high hopes of success from the very beginning, and some pretty incredible marketing to help realize those hopes. Ironically, their ultimate problem was that too much of their budget was spent on marketing and not enough on game design and development. The company was based in Longwood Florida, but was officially headquartered in Nassau, the Bahamas in hopes of protecting themselves from the wrath of the "Mighty N." By 1990, the company was off the ground and running with the multicart idea, and in January of 1991 Action 52 was released. All programming was done in-house at AE and no other developers were used. AE even decided to distribute the game themselves, making it available for purchase initially by mail order with the possibility

Action 52 and Cheetahmen II Box Fronts



of some distribution smaller mom and pop type stores. According to a surviving press kit, they originally marketed more heavily in Europe, which explains why the manuals are in multiple languages. There was also a pack-in insert that explains how to make the game work for different regions, similar to the cyclone chip of today. They assumed since the game was made in America that it would automatically sell well here.

By 1993 AE realized that the quality of their games had become a BIG problem. They were infamous for making lackluster games with an expensive price tag so they decided to bring in some outside programming help to improve their ideas. They contracted Farsight Technology (known as Farsight Studio today) located in California to help with development. Jay Obernolte (who also designed Color a Dinosaur) and Chris Ziomkowski from Farsight were two of the programmers that worked with AE early on. Farsight allegedly made the final revisions for the NES Action 52 to make it more playable, but their main task was to port the multicart over to the newer 16-bit systems as the NES was being phased out. With Farsight's help AE released Action 52 with improved 256-color graphics on the Sega Genesis/Megadrive systems and were developing it for SNES as well. On top of that they were contracted to start work on another collection simply known as "Sports 5." The sports multicart only existed as a barely playable demo when Farsight broke ties with AE. Farsight apparently received a more lucrative contract from Sega to work on some football games on the Genesis.

Amidst all of this, AE was working on their master plan, to take over the world via some Cheetahmen. AE postulated that if some Thundercats and Ninja Turtles can do it, then why not a hybrid of the two? So they introduced Apollo, Hercules, and Aries! Cheetahmen was the 52nd game on the Action 52 cartridge, and was intended to be their signature game (like Mario is to

Nintendo).

I know how comical that sounds but it is true... they wanted a signature flagship game for people to associate with them, which is great business plan, if (big if) the signature game/characters are actually good! They must have believed so, since they had HUGE expectations for the Cheetahmen. They had plans for 6-inch action figures, 16-inch dolls, t-shirts, a comic book series and even a syndicated TV cartoon show.



Action 52

The game came with a price tag of \$199.99, which equals out to about \$4.00 per game. Considering that Nintendo products at the time had a price tag of over near \$50 each, this was an apparent bargain. Even though Action 52 offered a lot of variety at a cheap price-per-game it was a horrendous flop, mostly because of the quality of the games. Almost all the games were buggy at best and many were so unplayable because of glitches that they shouldn't even be counted as a game. Because of all the glitches and problems the game has several known variations, as well as 2 known box revisions:

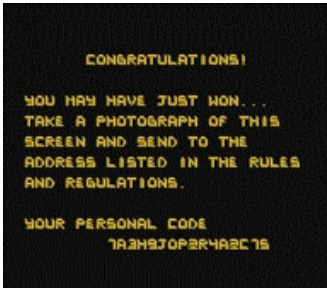
- Action 52 (blue label, green PCB board) REV A
- Action 52 (blue label, black PCB board)
- Action 52 (clear label, black PCB board)
- Action 52 (clear label, green PCB board) REV A
- Action 52 (clear label, green PCB board) REV B
- Action 52 Box (with retail price)
- Action 52 Box (without retail price)

Most of the games on the cart were 1 or 2 player shoot'em type games but it did have a wide variety of sports, fighting and platforming games as well.

The Action 52 manual was nothing more than simple basic controls for each of the 52 games, but the very last page of the manual has an order form to purchase a full manual for each game for \$2 apiece shipped. None of these mail-away manuals have been found to date and were mostly likely never produced. The also lowered the MSRP at least once for Action 52. The pinkish ad shows a price point for the game at \$99.95, and the existing press kit shows a wholesale price of \$40 per cart.

The \$104,000 Contest

What better way to help market a game than a winner take all contest right? Wrong. AE decided to offer a 104,000 contest for the first person to beat the #5 game on Action 52 called OOZE. The game consists of 5 horrible, barely playable levels. Well, at least the music is kinda catchy! After completing the 5th level a screen appeared saying Congratulations and giving instructions on what to do (shown below). The controls in the game are horrid and I encourage anyone to even try even making it past the first pit jump in the game.



If some how you managed to get through the game (which is practically impossible due to glitches in level 2 &3) you had to send photo proof and the official entry form (shown below) to the Bahamas for them to inspect. If you passed that phase of the contest you would be given 24 hours (3 days 8 hours a day) to complete the game in person in front of a company representative to actually win the prize. Once all this was achieved to their satisfaction the winner would receive \$104,000 dollars, 52k in cash, and 52k in future scholarships. As far as anyone knows no one actually won this contest, and even if they did it is unlikely that Active would have actually had the money to pay out anyways. I guess the real question is, if a contest with no prize and a barely playable game



can even really considered a contest?

Cheetahmen II

Cheetahmen II was slated to be the first stand alone single game cart that AE was going to release. It was the sequel to the 52nd game on Action 52 entitled Cheetahmen. This game is regarded in NES collecting communities as one of the worst titles in the library; however it has reached cult classic status to some who really enjoy how bad it truly is.

The back-story of the Cheetahmen was given in a 12-page comic book included with Action 52, Active's only released NES game. "Mad scientist Dr. Morbis kills a mother cheetah while on safari in Africa, and then takes her three cubs for his genetic research. Subjected to his experiments, the cubs grow into half-cheetah, half-human creatures. Once they learn of Morbis's evil plans, they turn on him, and he in turn creates an army of half-animal humans (known as "Sub-Species") to stop the Cheetahmen once and for all" (from wikipedia).

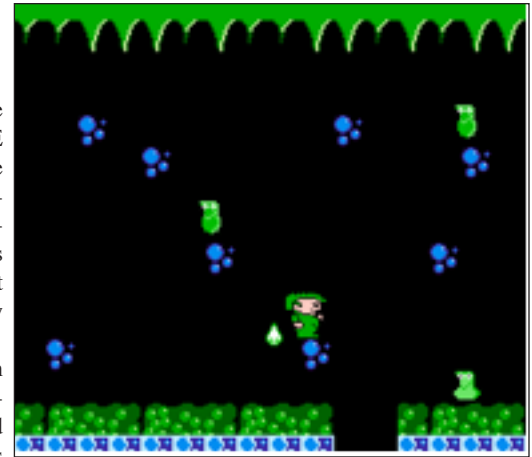
At the beginning of the NES version of the game there was an intro sequence that told a brief storyline as well. A young boy simply called the Action Gamemaster (discussed later) is at home playing a video game when a robotic arm (assumed to be Cygore) reaches through the screen and pulls him into the game. Once inside the game he meets the Cheetahmen, who offer to help defend him against the evil Dr. Morbis.

The Cheetahmen are all named after Greek Gods and are thought to be similar in nature and action to those gods.

Heroes	
Hercules	The Greek god, son of Zeus and a mortal woman. Peaceful by nature but will fight if forced. Uses no weapons but has great strength.
Aries	The Greek God of War. He is a supreme fighter and fights with 2 wooden clubs in the game.
Apollo	Son of Zeus and the thought to be the most powerful of the gods. He leads the Cheetahmen into battle. He is an archer and wields a crossbow.

Villians	
Dr. Morbis	Evil Geneticist
Cygore	Dr. Morbis' Assistant, w/ robotic arm
White Rhino	Sub-Species of an endangered rhino
Scavenger	Sub-Species of a vulture
Hyena	Sub-Species of a Hyena (dog-like)
Ape-Man	Most powerful foe, Sub-Species of an ape

As the game progresses you play as a different Cheetahmen every 2 levels. Due to a glitch, it is nearly impossible to play



the game as Aries without altering the code for the game or being the lucky recipient of a glitch that very rarely starts the game on these two levels.

Technically CMII is an unreleased game because AE left the gaming scene before the game was ever distributed to the public. The game went into production, but the finished stock sat in a warehouse in Florida, having never been paid for. After a few years sitting in the warehouse the stock was sold off to Sean Roche. Sean was looking to dump the whole lot to someone in a bulk deal for \$1 each for all the units. After speaking with a few old NES sceners, the infamous Mike Etlar purchased the lot sometime in 1997. He then started selling them off for what we would all consider ungodly cheap prices now. The reason the games hardly ever show up loose or cart only is cause the games were all sold to collectors sealed and most people didn't want to break the seal. At the time, people were shocked when a few hit around the \$100 mark on eBay. 10 years later the game never sells for less than \$300+ and is one of the most sought after titles in the NES library for collectors. The Cheetahmen II carts used the same style clear cases as Action 52 did, only with a small gold sticker staying Cheetahmen II on it (yes it was misspelled on all of them).



CES '94

AE's last endeavor to succeed as a game company was at the Consumer Electronics Show in 1994. The company had an elaborate booth constructed that was very attractive, portable and easy to assemble and disassemble (according to the designer.) At the booth you could try out some of their games, pick up a press kit, or view some of their up-and-coming ideas. At CES they announced many of their future plans such as Cheetahmen III, and the 16-bit handheld ActionGameMaster (shown below).



Active Entertainment's Display Booth

The AGM would have compatibility add-ons (sold separately) for NES, SNES, Genesis, CD

Rom based games, and even a TV tuner. It is generally believed that the AGM was a conceptual idea only and was barely if at all under development. The full press kit is available from the old TSR Archive at <http://www.atarihq.com/tsr/special/active.html>

The press kit discloses plans to release games for the Sega Game Gear and the Nintendo Gameboy as well. They even planned to have Cheetahmen character suits make appearances at conventions and expos!

Although Active Enterprises made some pretty terrible products, they still made a pretty big splash in the NES gaming world. They had high hopes of success and assumed that if they marketed themselves well, they could overcome the burden of pushing lack-luster products. Of course that wasn't the case and the failed pretty miserably in terms of profit and production. Many have thought the company simply went bankrupt and disappeared off the face of the Earth, which is not true at all. By 1994 they had decided to leave game production and get into the burgeoning computer business. By 2001 they had merged with "Voice Technologies" and began work with web design, software

development and applications for speech recognition. I couldn't find more current info on the Voice Technologies or AE past 2001 so it is assumed that both companies no longer exist. I tried calling and emailing all known information for them and turned up zilch as of 12-20-07. So your only hope now is to go crack open the seal on that Cheetahmen II sitting on your shelf and enjoy the "great" work of Active Enterprises LTD.

- UNRELEASED PRODUCTS**

 - ActionGameMaster Hand Held System
 - Cheetahmen II (NES) (later released by third parties)
 - Action 52 (SNES)
 - Sports 5 (SNES/Genesis)
 - Cheetahmen III (for the ActionGameMaster slated for the 3rd quarter of 1993 release)



Want to be featured?

Do you draw? Do you paint? Do you knit? Do you blow up lots of balloons and try to fly into the atmosphere while doing Sudoku? Do it up, we'll put it in.





A Look at the NES Accessory Market

Article by Pieter Verhallen

For those that do not know me, I am an avid collector of NES accessories and games. I've recently started collecting and hanging around the various forums again, during the Spring of 2005 (after collecting for about a year back in around 1997), and I've since spent a lot of time acquiring accessories from around the globe. Ninten-



doAGE is an awesome community for NES collectors, and I'm glad that I've been given a chance to give back by providing some of the knowledge that I've accumulated over the years. In this column you will find articles related to accessories, but you can expect me to occasionally write about other topics. I'll also showcase a particular accessory and its manufacturer/publisher in each issue, starting next month.

The NES Accessory Market

The NES accessory market has been on the rise for the past few years, especially in the United States. Perhaps collectors are look-

The NES Accessory Market

ing for other ways to expand their collections after reaching game goals, or maybe the undocumented aspect of NES accessories has been appealing. Regardless – there has been a slow, but steady increase in accessory demand and collectability. In this article, I am going to give a brief overview on the current market, what's hot and what's not, and I'll also divide accessories into some groups that a collector may want to focus on, to make the hobby a bit easier to delve into.

“There has been a slow, but steady increase in accessory demand and collectability.”

While there has been increasing interest for NES accessories, the collector's market is still very young, with many price fluctuations. This is primarily caused by some certain types

of buyers and sellers. While buyers ultimately pay the price, it is the sellers who have to first identify and then bring these items to market. Market information about NES accessories isn't widely known, leading to uneducated consumers. Because accessories historically haven't sold as well as games, many accessories are also still in the hands of private consumers or warehouse managers, who often deem them to be old and. Many sellers and resellers know that there is a collector's value attached to retro games, but not for retro accessories. What this leads to is a lack of supply, especially on the internet, and a lack of proper advertising for those items that are put up for sale. It is therefore extremely important to know, as a buyer, where to look and what to look for – something I may elaborate on in the future – as many accessories can be found for relatively cheap prices. The best-selling accessories have always been those that have been well-advertised and were exposed to the select few with an avid interest in them. This is comparable to any other type of collectables, where timing, keywords and placement can affect the value of an item significantly.

For instance, within one month's time, the licensed Speedboard accessory sold once for a mere \$0.99, and another time for around \$100.



Pressman Speedboard (market)

It should be noted that this is a phenomenon seen mostly in sales to customers in the United States. For other regions, such as Europe and Australia, one would find more casual buyers willing

to spend no more than what the casual seller is asking, so prices (before shipping) in these other areas tend to remain low. If there's one philosophy to go by as an accessory collector, it's to simply take what you can get. Surely patience is a virtue, but in the NES accessory market, you never know if something will ever show up a second time!



Konami Hyperbeam (Licensed Third-Party)

Next up, what's HOT and what's NOT!

HOT:

Licensed: One of the first things you will notice is that there is generally a

strong correlation between price, and licensed versus unlicensed accessories. If an item is licensed, you can expect it to gain more attention and sell for more. I have a hunch that people tend to mistake licensed with “first-party” and hence believe that a licensed accessory set is easily attainable. However, this is not the case – there are many licensed third party releases, and even third party releases that had both licensed and unlicensed variants.

Game-related accessories:

Another key factor that increases demand and allows for a higher base price is whether the accessory is linked to, or was originally included with, a game – such as the Arkanoid Vaus controller. Be sure to advertise what games an accessory can be used with when putting one up for sale!

Brands:

It should be noted that some brands sell for more. Beeshu is a good example. They released quite a few accessories for the Nintendo NES, both licensed and unlicensed, and some in various colors (i.e. Beeshu Zinger and Zipper). The packaging is similar across the different models in each set, so this makes them even more collectable.



Beeshu Gizmo (brand)

Obscure:

As with many other collector hobbies, more obscure items tend to be in high demand. Come across a lock for your Nintendo (such as the “Homework First” lock), and expect it to reach a good price!

Rare:

While this is generally self-explanatory, I'd like to elaborate that with accessories, rarity is not always linked to price as the actual rarity for many accessories hasn't been established yet. However, among the hottest accessories lately are boxed carrying or storage cases, which have proven to be quite rare in the past few years. Be sure to pick these up if you come across them in the wild!



Gamester Nintendo Action Case

*Camera
Video-
blaster
(light guns)*

Light guns:

Everyone likes to shoot at the screen, so expect there to be demand for them, especially scarcer releases like the Camera Videoblaster or the Nexoft ProBeam.



NES-era releases:

Most accessories sold during the NES era will be in higher demand by collectors than those sold thereafter. Examples here are cleaning kits, as well as AC adaptors and RF units (especially originally packaged licensed ones).

Wireless:



MX2 Cordless Game Pad (wireless)

Wireless controllers tend to be in higher demand – probably more by gamers than collectors. Nevertheless utility is something that factors into the demand for an item.

Original packaging:

One thing that really boosts the value of and demand for an accessory is complete original packaging. Loose accessories can be difficult to archive neatly, and instruction manuals provide interesting insight into each item. So for most accessory collectors, CIB seems to be the way to go.

*Cheetah CharacterStick Range
(original packaging)*



NOT:

Unlicensed:

While I personally do not limit myself to licensed accessories, most buyers seem to do so, and hence unlicensed accessories tend to go for less.



Super Cobra Viper III (unlicensed)

AC adaptors or RF units, sell well to their intended market (the casual player looking to reincarnate their old system) they do not seem to be very hot among collectors. Aside from being uninteresting and often from no-name brands, many of these are still in production with packaging variants hitting the market on a constant basis.

Marketed for NES:

If it doesn't explicitly state that the item is to be used with the Nintendo NES (despite being compatible with it or not), expect there to be little demand from collectors.

Limiting the Collection!

Ok, last but not least, I'll quickly go over some extra accessory characteristics that one can use to create subsets to their collection goals. Aside from the common methods of collecting for a particular brand or region, or specifically for any other characteristic mentioned in the Hot or Not section, here are some other methods that can be taken into account:

Retail releases sold individually:

An easy way to specialize your accessory collection is to stick to collecting accessories that were sold individually in their own packaging, available to the public. There are some that were never released with a box (especially aftermarket releases and of course those released in a console set, for example), and others that were not available to the open public (such as test center equipment) that can easily be dismissed by this criterion.



NASA Remote Controller (Retail)

Connector:

While most – if not all – accessories in the United States have a 7-pin plug compatible with the normal Nintendo NES, there are other types out there, especially in other regions. This is something that can be taken into account when choosing what to collect. In South America, where NES and Famiclones are more common, some unlicensed accessory releases will have a 9-pin connector to be used with the 9-pin ports commonly found on clone systems. This is sometimes also the case in Southern parts of Europe, most notably Italy and Spain, where one can also find controllers with 7-pin connectors that are only compatible with clone consoles and not the original NES. Moreover, while most controllers with the 7-pin connector seem to be universal, it has been experienced that some from one region will not work properly on a console from another region (i.e. NTSC first party controllers and wireless controllers on certain PAL consoles), so keep that in mind when choosing to collect worldwide or for a specific region. Lastly, we should not forget the AV Famicom (official “top-loader” Famicom), in which case Nintendo replaced the 9-pin Famicom



Myiocco 8-bit Joypad (aftermarket)

ports with 7-pin NES ones. The accessory manufacturer HORI, for example, released at least one 7-pin controller for the AV Famicom.

Accessory type:

Unlike games, accessories are created to perform different functions. There are controllers, cleaning kits, ac adaptors, storage units, cheat devices and adaptors, oddities like dust covers, wireless headphones, multiple different locks, a Zapper sighting scope, etc. Sticking to a single type of accessory can really help you to focus your collecting efforts!

*Datel Pro Action
Replay (accessory
type)*



Variants:

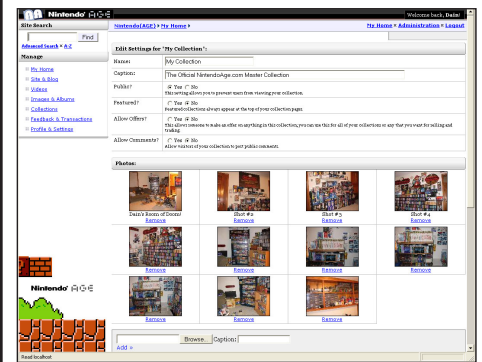
Many accessories, especially controllers, will often have variants (packaging, licensed versus unlicensed, etc). My advice is to only collect variants if you're going to collect worldwide releases, as many variants, especially outside North America, are linked to different regions and lots of excess stock seems to have been exported to other regions adding some confusion here.

This introduction has been written



from my personal experience and observations as a collector, but in the next issue you can expect a more detailed analysis of NES accessories. One might ask: "What's the point of collecting accessories?" I think the reasons will differ greatly from the reasons that game collectors might give, because whether licensed or unlicensed, let's face it – a great many accessories suck! While someone could potentially collect them for actual use, the current avid collectors seem to have different

reasons for collecting them (personally, my initial motivation was to document them), so I guess one could compare this collector segment to that of collecting sealed games or action figures. Either way, good luck to whoever sets their foot on the path of accessory collecting – and enjoy the journey! ;)



A new year. A new website.

Coming soon.



It's the most wonderful time of the year (for hunting)

Article by Basil Timmins

Tis the season, or, rather, was the season, I guess, by the time you read this. But as I coasted along through yet another busy December of watching everyone around me ramp it up into high gear in preparation for Christmas, I couldn't help but hit the streets myself in search of some of those elusive holiday gifts. The only difference though, is that most of the time I wasn't looking for gifts for someone else, but for me. You see, I made an interesting discovery a while back about the joys of thrifting for NES games at precisely this time of year.

"But wait a minute!" you're thinking; "who goes hunting for classic games in the dead of winter?" Well I do, for one, and I'll tell you exactly why you should too.

Now everyone and his dog knows (thinks!) that the best time of year to hit those pawns and fleas and what have you is in the spring. And who could argue? People are doing their spring cleaning, throwing out their old, forgotten junk, having their first yard sales of the year, and on and on and on... and of course there is always bound to be a mound of

treasure amid all that trash. So I'm definitely not here to say that you shouldn't be hunting for games in the spring, or that it's not a good time, because it most positively is; what I'm saying is that it's not the best time of year to go thrifting – not by a long shot.

In my experience, December (and to a lesser extent, early January) is, far and away, the best month of the year to hit up all those stores you gave up on back in September. Think about it: everyone has a million things to do and a ton of presents to buy, and what does all that take: time, and most importantly, MONEY. Well, unfortunately for both you and I, it appears that money does not, in fact, grow on trees after all. So what is a family to do? Sell their old games of course! I cannot tell you how many times I've walked into a store/pawn/flea/whatever in early December, a location that hasn't had a drop of new games in six months, only to be hit with the view of like ten newly arrived CIB NES games just dying to find a good clean home. Indeed, I can visit the two largest flea markets in my city on each and every weekend in December, back to back, and I'll be damned if I don't see some different new "stock" on every single visit. And I can guarantee you right now that there is no other month of the year where I can even come close to making a claim like that.

Of course, December is not the only good time of year to go out on the hunt. Summer is great if you're the yard or garage sale type of guy, and you can never discount the lucrative gems that have a way of showing up every spring. Actually, counted as a season in

full, spring probably has more stuff "outed" overall in the course of its three month flow. But the difference with December is that it's so concentrated; you get all these desperate people trying to scrounge up some extra money, all for the same reason, and all at exactly the same time! And that really is the key to my (and hopefully your) past and future success. I will tell you right now that I don't even bother with "the wild" from October to April at all, except for the four weeks of December and maybe the first couple of weekends in January. In my neck of the woods, 95% of the new stuff that shows up in the autumn/winter months is concentrated entirely in that one little time span. So what am I trying to say? For those of you who long ago gave up on "the hunt" during the winter months out of fear that you'd be doing nothing more than wasting your time and your gas, get back out there and check out all your haunts! Now is the perfect time to scoop up all those misfit games that have been cast away by thrifty families in their frenetic search for a couple of extra Christmas bucks. This joyous season is a brief, and yet very, very worthwhile oasis in the middle of that long stretch of dried up fleas and dead-stock pawn shops that stretches out from roughly Labour Day to early May. Just make sure you've got enough spare cash because there's a lot of stuff out there that's not getting picked through as much as it normally would. People are on tight budgets, you know; it's the "brokest" time of year! So anyway, the reality is, if you haven't been out for a look-see this season, you're really missing out.

Welcome to the

FUN PAGE

Take a break from the deep thoughts of the NES community's finest.

Try to find your favorite people from the NintendoAGE scene in this wonderful word search!



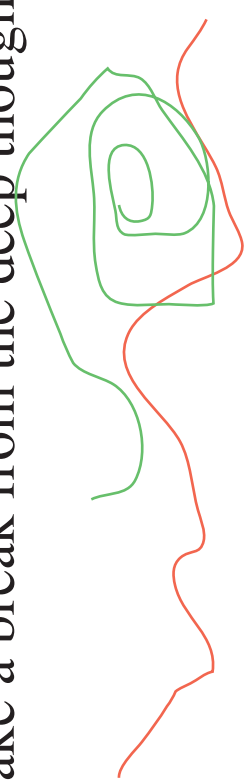
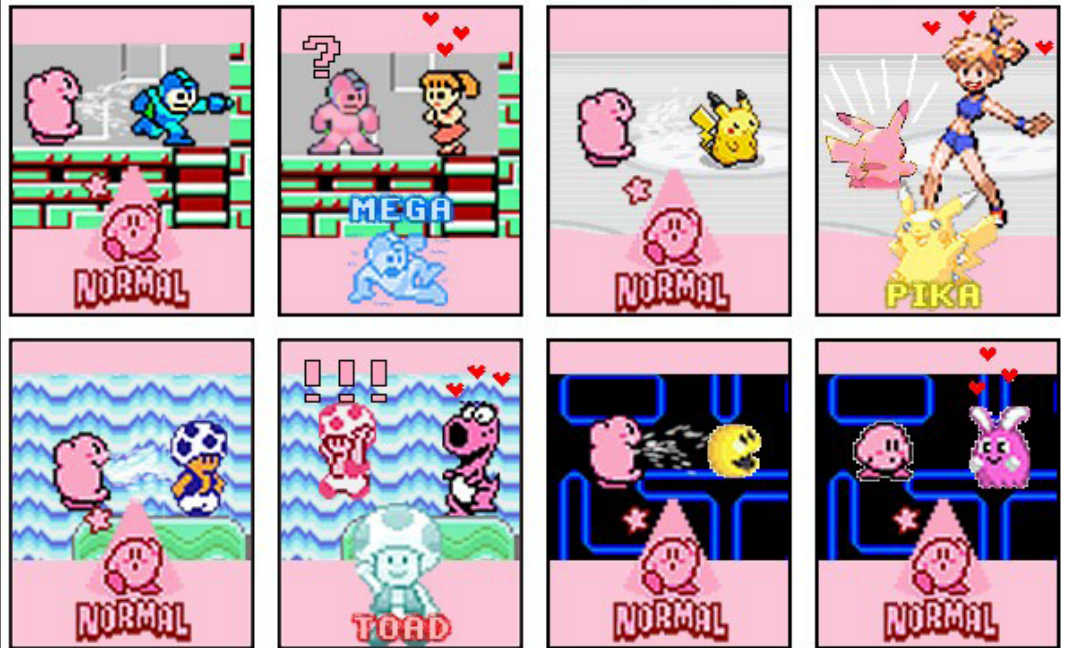
Words to find:

- | | | | |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|--------------------|
| NationalGameDepot | Battymo | Limbofunk | Dr. Morbis |
| dangevin | DreamTR | Speedy_NES | PSerge |
| Dain | Bronty | The_Wizard | Ninfan |
| Mario's Left Nut | Bradley | bunnyboy | flyingducky |
| UncleTusk | jimposhuk | BootGod | Freedman |
| Sivak | justabum | Nesboy | Hounder Likes Boys |
| Gatorayyy | | | Get Shroomed |

Name: _____
 Date: _____
 Teacher: _____

I feel asleep.

By Dan Langevin. Sprites from Sriters-Resource.com



This Month's Member Spotlight:

FREEDMAN

Name: Harrison Freedman

Age: 18

Location: Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Occupation: "I'm a Film student at Ryerson University, but I'm also a video editor for the entertainment news website www.andpop.com"

Is your work up anywhere? "I'm in the process of getting a website together for my own work. Most of my work has been for film competitions in Ontario (which I've won a few golds :P)"

Children? "Haha, I hope not. :P"

Collection size? "304 NES games. Right now it's all I collect. Small, but slowly getting there. My friends come over and are immediatly put back in their childhood. I've had

nothing but support from everyone I know, and they definitely see it as a huge collection."

Why did you get into the collecting scene? "I grew sick and tired of modern video games, and pulled out an old copy of TMNT for the NES.

From there, I wanted to play them all, it then grew to wanting to own them all. I also moved in March (when I started) and finally had the space to do so."

Favorite NES Game: "For the NES it's a tie between The Legend of Zelda & Battletoads.

Overall, easily The Ocarina of Time . Nothing will ever replace that game. It's a classic. Video games would be nowhere if it weren't for OoT."

Least Favorite NES Game: "Where In Time is Carmen Sandiego. Who wants to learn about history while playing video games? I can't sit through it."

What would you spend your money on if you didn't collect for the NES? "My other hobby is competition precision shooting. It's a really expensive sport, that would benefit from all the money I spend on video games."

Fondest Memory of Video Gaming: "That's easy. I was about 10 years old and Ocarina of

Time had just been released. Every store was out of it and I couldn't get my hands on it. For some reason or another my parents had to go downtown, and Toys R Us was just closing, but we decided to check anyways. They had one last copy of the Gold OoT cart, and it had my name written all over it. I've never been so excited to get a video game in my life. I still play it all the time."

Anything you'd like to say for all the world to see? "Alright, I'm going to take a quick stab at the modern video game market. I think it's terrible that we even label most games as video games anymore. To me, a video game is not simulated reality, but something you shouldn't be able to experience anywhere else. Similar to a good movie, a game should put you in an alternate setting, a whole new world or life. This is why retro games are so important. You see games that had imagination and creativity. They were never attempts to replace real life like games today are."

Collection goals for 2008? By the end of 2008 I want to be on the last stretch, the last 100 games for my collection. I started in march and was able to reach 300 games by Decemember. It shouldn't be too hard.



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