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Stadium Events: How To Tell

Article by Jason Smith

Stadium Events (SE) is one of the most sought after games by NES collectors. Unfortunately there are scammers who might try to pass off the more common and less valuable PAL version as the truly rare NTSC release. I decided my column in the NintendoAGE e-Zine would present a good opportunity to spread the word about how to tell the difference. There are numerous variations between the different



“There are numerous variations . . . and it is easy to tell them apart if you know what to look for.”

regional releases of the game, and it is easy to tell them apart if you know what to look for. I will break down, piece-by-piece, a complete-in-box SE so you can be informed as to whether or not you are bidding on the real deal, even from a bad picture.

Let's start with the cartridge, since it is the most common piece to the puzzle and shows up the most often. There are 3 huge dead-giveaways on the cart. First are the different seals of quality. The NTSC has a round bronze seal, and the PAL has the oval white seal. Next is what I call the “80's-tastic” picture. The PAL cart has the 80's pic beside the game title, plus the



NTSC cart vs. PAL carts Can you tell the difference?



The two manuals side-by-side: Easily discernible.

PAL title in on 2 lines where as the NTSC is only on 1. The NTSC version also has the large white copyright information section on the bottom, whereas the PAL does not. The PAL cart also has the B on the bottom right side of the label for PAL region B.

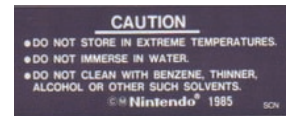
Next lets look at the manual. The manual is probably the easiest to tell the difference on. The NTSC version is predominately white with green and orange accent bars. The PAL version is primarily dark blue with light blue and yellow accent bars. Besides the obvious color differences they are in different languages as well. PAL is in German/English while NTSC is just English.

Finally we shall examine the illustrious SE box. This is hands down the hardest licensed box to get and one of the most sought after NTSC items in the NES library. Since only 1-2 NTSC

boxes have been sold in the last several years, it is much more likely to find a PAL one disguised as an NTSC, than a genuine NTSC one. Many sellers try to pawn off PAL boxes as NTSC ones so this may save you from getting burnt in hopes of getting that “super find” we all want. The cart and box have many similarities. The easiest to notice from a bad eBay picture is the seals. NTSC has the round and PAL has the oval. Another way to tell is notice the placement of the 3 lines of red text, the NTSC has the text below the seal of quality, while the

PAL has the text above the seal of quality. Also the PAL box has the small black warning: “For use with the Mattel Console” beside the Series 2 logo, whereas the NTSC doesn't. The last big difference is the one that is the hardest to tell from a distance. The 2 runners have a different placement on the boxes. On the NTSC box, the runners look like they are running to the round seal. On the PAL one, it looks more like they are jumping over it. Also notice the blue runner's arm in association with the “jumbotron” in the screenshots. The PAL runner's elbow touches it while the NTSC runner's elbow is below it.

The PAL SE was produced in 2 regions, NES-SD-EEC and NES-SD-SCN. The only difference between these 2 games is simply the region code itself. The SCN version is much harder to find though, and should bring in a little more cash than the -EEC version will. The -SCN code has an -EEC front label though, the SCN code is on the back label ONLY as shown below:



Since the -SCN is just a back label swap someone could fake an -SCN SE if they wanted to except for the other big difference with the -SCN version, the manual. It is a bright yellow instead of the dark blue the -EEC version uses. The -SCN manual is in Swedish, Danish, and Finnish but with German text on the cover. The -SCN version was packed into a -EEC box since it was just an import into the Scandinavian countries and the boxes are the exact same.

That wraps up the major differences between spending \$200-400 vs. spending \$2000-4000+ on the different versions of SE. So now if you see a poorly listed SE and are trying to figure out which version it is without posting it into the forum, now you know how. Good hunting and good luck!



The same colors as the Swedish Flag!



Article by Dain Anderson

As if hunting for variations weren't enough for the brave souls that are up to the challenge, hunting for unlicensed variations – especially ones by Color Dreams and Bunch Games – is borderline insanity. Making matters worse is the steadily-increasing prices that these games command, and the steady trickle of new discoveries made almost monthly – it *truly* is enough to make a variations collector go a little cuckoo. We certainly don't want anyone getting admitted to the ol' insane asylum (yet), so we'll start with the basics of Color Dreams and Bunch Games variations, the ones that are most sought after and the ones that a variant collector, at minimum, should be concerned about: blue vs. black carts.

If you weren't already aware, Color Dreams and Bunch Games are the same company – they also make the Wisdom Tree line of games, the same ones we'll intentionally omit from this article. The reason for this is simple: an abundance of legitimate, unused and leftover Wisdom Tree labels has flooded the market this year, and anyone can easily create fake carts. For this reason, be very suspicious of oddities like a blue Spiritual Warfare (see Figure 1), blue Sunday Funday or a blue Joshua & The Battle of Jericho – all likely fakes. We won't go as far as saying they don't exist, but proving their legitimacy would prove to be nearly impossible.

One of the biggest unanswered questions about the blue vs. black variations is why they exist in the first place. We know that the black versions are later releases, and it is surmised that the reason behind this was either lower production costs and/or a way to distinguish between releasing these games abroad (specifically, Canada and Europe – in Europe, many



BLACK AND BLUE

(Your Forehead after Tracking Color Dreams Variations!)

have the “Micro Genius” label on the box), being that most of the black versions are found outside of the United States.

With the exception of Secret Scout – for which the blue version is slightly more scarce – the black versions of all Bunch Games and Color Dreams carts are more difficult to obtain than their blue counterparts. The following grid shows which variations exist, their relative rarity to one another, as well as which one is more scarce. If you haven't read my previous columns, I use the term “relative rarity” as how we distinguish between games in this variations subset and how rare they are, relative to one another and their frequency. If a game has a relative rarity of 1, this means that every time you find this game, you have an equal (1-to-1) chance of it being either variation. If a game has a relative rarity of 3, this indicates that one of them will be the version that is more scarce. Keep in mind, this serves as only an estimate, and in some cases, you might find a certain variation one out of a hundred (or more) encounters. [Editor's note: as mentioned briefly, region can play a large part as well for “hunting in the wild.”]

The images in Figure 2 are what

we'll call “The Big Four.” These are the ones you want to hunt down at any cost, as there are fewer than 10 of each known to exist. If you already have them, consider yourself fortunate! If you don't, start crying, as your chances of getting them is slim-to-none, save for one of your fellow collectors who own one spontaneously combusting. Jason Smith (aka, NationalGameDepot) is the only collector (that we know of) who has all of the known blue vs. black variations. In a future column, we'll dive into the other types of variations for Color Dreams, Bunch Games and Wisdom Tree games, such as back labels, contest labels, regional box stickers, in-game code versions and many other noteworthy differences.

Directly Below (Figure 2): The big four “must have” Color Dreams variants.



	Blue	Black	Relative Rarity	Which is Rarer?
Bunch Games				
Castle of Deceit	Yes	Yes	8	Black
Galactic Crusader	Yes	Yes	9	Black
Mission Cobra	Yes	No	n/a	n/a
Moon Ranger	Yes	Yes	7	Black
Tagin' Dragon	Yes	No	n/a	n/a
Color Dreams				
Adventures of Captain Comic	Yes	Yes	4	Black
Baby Boomer	Yes	Yes	8	Black
Challenge of the Dragon	Yes	Yes	8	Black
Crystal Mines	Yes	Yes	9	Black
King Neptune's Adventures	Yes	Yes	8	Black
Master Chu and the Drunkard Hu	Yes	Yes	6	Black
Menace Beach	Yes	Yes	7	Black
Metal Fighter	Yes	Yes	10	Black
Operation Secret Storm	Yes	No	n/a	n/a
Pesterminator	Yes	Yes	6	Black
P'radikus Conflict	Yes	Yes	5	Black
Raid 2020	Yes	Yes	10	Black
Robodemons	Yes	No	n/a	n/a
Secret Scout	Yes	Yes	3	Blue
Silent Assault	Yes	Yes	7	Black

Figure 1





Kid Icarus, The Failure!

Article by Stan Stepanic

What's up biatches?! As you can see, I finally have a name for my column here, though I had it before, I simply forgot to mention it to the article guys. At any rate, it's time to get uber elite sehr topp rariade! What's that mean? In case you didn't figure it out from my sweet article last time, it means I'm going to turn you into a true NES historian, pulling out background information and stuff otherwise not readily accessible to the common fan. I could easily dish out a million stories since I grew up with the system and was with it from the day it was first released, but I thought, wait a minute, can I think of anything that happened NES-wise in November? I wrote an article about Ghoulish School in October for Halloween, so there has to be something fitting to do for this month. So what would be more fitting than to go back to my first significant experience with the NES? Out of sheer luck it happened in November, so I figured it would be a good idea to think back to the time when my collecting began and when my obsession with the NES started to grow — when I first entered the world of Kid Icarus.

Kid Icarus? Some of you may wonder why, out of all the earlier titles, this one in particular? Why not The Legend of Zelda, Gradius or simply the original Super Mario Bros? Well, there was simply something about the game that mesmerized me, seeing it sitting there in front of the television after being told I had a surprise waiting after my report card. I never was even able to get past the third level in the first stage for several months and never even beat the game until I eventually cheated with the "Icarus Fights Medusa Angels" passcode. Yet it was this game alone that started my NES hobby and fandom.

Why then, if I was so fond of the game, why wasn't anyone else?



With no series and only one sequel, Kid Icarus really had no lasting impression on the video game market. I find this quite strange for a Nintendo production, so this month I will explore Kid Icarus by presenting a bit of a history of the game, drawing upon memories from "back in the day" to shed some personal light on the situation. In my mind, there are three reasons why it never became legendary: the climate of the market at its release, the game content and most importantly its date of release. Let's check it out and get our rariade goggles on!

Kid Icarus was released in the first year of the NES. At this time, nearly every genre was still in its infancy, at least in the sense that there was plenty of room for improvement. Most platformers followed the format set forth in Super Mario Bros. and added a variety of different features, weapons and so forth. Most other games in the NES library were simple arcade ports. The general mood of most players I knew at this time, recalling gaming with my friends and schoolmates, was to lean towards platformers that had a sense of action or adventure to them, such as Solomon's Key or Rygar.

Two such games that really set the bar were Castlevania, and two months later Metroid; I can't recall a single friend who wasn't obsessed with either of these. Castlevania was perhaps the most popular of all in spite of what the Nintendo Power issues said at the time. Kid Icarus seems to fit the bill for this type of game, being that it incorporated ideas and gameplay quite similar to games like Rygar and Metroid. But strangely, I was the only person in my school who actually owned it, and one of the few who even knew of the title. I remember mentioning it to one friend while looking over a Battle Beasts poster, and at the time he could only recall having seen a few pictures in the Nintendo Fun Club Newsletter from 1988 (right before Nintendo Power came into existence). That's it! So if the market seemed potentially ripe at the time for a game like this, what happened?

The first thing that comes to mind is game content. Platformers started to lean more towards serious themes and action, which is why most of my friends were playing Rygar and Castlevania while

I was the only one who had an interest in Kid Icarus. It was one of two 'password paks' that enabled the player to save their game and continue at a later time, a strong new selling point. Metroid was the other. Consider the following: Metroid and Kid Icarus were essentially the same game in many respects because they were made using the same engine. Metroid features a bounty hunter chasing aliens, weird creatures, monstrous bosses, all through various creepy environments. Kid Icarus features a little angel attacking goofy, child-like creatures with teeny-weeny arrows, fairly tame bosses in terms of both design and difficulty, through environments based loosely on Greek mythology. The differences in tone and theme are quite clear. The whimsical atmosphere that Kid Icarus presented was perceived as less serious and therefore less enticing to players at the time.

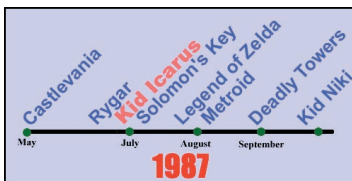
Though the box art was still based on the black-box format used prior, if you compare the two, it's pretty obvious which game a young boy would select off a store shelf. Looking at them objectively without any reference to characters or anything, we see one has a goofy looking, almost baby-like character hopping towards some sort of amebous mass that doesn't really resemble anything, while the other features someone in a space suit blasting away at what are clearly aliens. I can tell you from seeing these sitting on the display that one just looked awesome and the other, well, pretty gay. Hell, even the colors are a bit effeminate. What's with the pink title font!

Kid Icarus Title Screen: Real men program pink into their games. Isn't that how the saying goes?



I could go on, but the distinction is clear, Kid Icarus simply didn't look and feel the same as a game like Metroid or Castlevania. I guess there was no real way to make it look dangerous, I mean let's think about it simply because that's all it takes. Angels or space aliens? What do you think kids wanted? Regardless, I don't regret that my parents bought it, but since they did while I wasn't there I wonder if I would have chosen it at the time. Furthermore, I wonder what made them pick it... A mystery best left unsolved. But this issue is something of a hypothesis based on personal experience. We looked at the basic market at the time and now have an idea of how it appeared to gamers, but what really did it in? To figure it out, let's just look at the numbers.

Without a doubt the major reason, if not the sole reason, Kid Icarus never picked up as much as it potentially could have, was the time period in which it was released. Let's examine a short list of some titles that were released at this time. Looking at the timeline, we see some of the most legendary titles were thrown out at this time,



Timeline: Perhaps pink font wasn't the catalyst after all.

and very rapidly. Nintendo Power reviews seem to have played an important part in the popularity of games at this time. Other titles were of course planned for 1988, but NP reverted back to analyzing and reviewing older games from 1987 and 86, presumably to reinforce their fan base. R.C. Pro Am, for example, had already been reviewed in the Nintendo Fun Club Newsletter from February/March 1988, but they did it again in Nintendo Power issue number two (September/October 1988) alongside Castlevania II. Kid Icarus never really got much support in their newsletter from the beginning, although you'll find it mentioned in the top scores section for quite awhile. In fact, looking at the Dealer's Picks in the back of several issues, you'll find that for a period of nearly a year, it holds a fairly high position, going from 8 down to 20 by March/June of 1989. By July/August 1989, however, you'll find

that Kid Icarus is no longer mentioned in the 'Top 30' section of the magazine, going from 5th place in the debut issue to 26th by the month before it disappeared. Other games, like Castlevania, pretty much never left the list. These numbers seem to indicate that Kid Icarus was fairly popular for awhile, but being from a relatively large school I can tell you that at least in my town, it wasn't.

Keep in mind that though these references in Nintendo Power seem to suggest otherwise, the magazine was as much of a reference guide as it was an advertising tool, so Nintendo had a tendency to place its own games a bit higher than they should have been. That's another reason why they pounded out another R.C. Pro-Am article, so you'd buy it. But the clear reason here for Kid Icarus' slow descent into obscurity, more or less, is the date of release. Metroid, with the same engine and released at the same time, was still holding a position of 20 in the 'Top 30' by 1990 but Kid Icarus was well behind and totally forgotten. It was released in a period of time when the market simply wasn't fertile enough for so many games of their caliber. Kid Icarus is a tough game with plenty of action, but Greek mythology isn't really the most appealing concept when you have vampires and aliens to contend with. Where would I have put it for release? Right there after Deadly Towers, baby, I can assure you, had this been done, it may have fared a bit better, or at least with a little more attention in the various gaming magazines. Perhaps it may have made more of a mark had it been released slightly earlier, who knows?

Regardless, it's clear why Kid Icarus didn't do as well as some of us may have hoped. It didn't fit into the current market as well as other games, its content was not as enticing as other titles at the time and it was released in a month where the most groundbreaking titles in video game history were bought in droves. So that's it, friends, I hope you enjoyed my short look into history to reveal why one of my most favorite games from my youth and the title that drew me into NES fandom never really got the attention it deserved. And now you are one more step to being uber rare. If you're wondering why I didn't do another interview, give me a break! Those

are special! Next time I'll dish out some more history and background for you so you can bitch slap the most knowledgeable of gamers with your gat full of NES data. Stan out. ***

[Editor's note: Stan draws upon his personal experiences which are decidedly those of a young male. Just to include a slice of the "bigger picture," I felt it appropriate to include some more information about the marketing of Kid Icarus, in relation to Metroid and Rad Racer.

Perhaps it's not too surprising of a revelation after reading some of Stan's observations (pink font!), but... this game was meant for girls! No offense to those who love this game, I love it too :) After seeing the cross-gender appeal of SMB, Nintendo wanted to try a sex-specific approach and make a targeted release that would not appeal widely to boys but rather girls. It was of course a legitimate release, but doubled as a marketing research experiment. Its purpose: to better gauge potential sales figures for future gender-specific releases by recording an accurate count of the female cross-section, and in doing so discern if it was profitable to do strictly feminine games as opposed to, well guys in space suits blasting aliens.

Obviously results were weak; Stan was a member of the vast video-gamer majority (young males) and as a result of the sales figures, there were a precious few NES girly-games made in the future. From thereon in, to capture the much-smaller female market, cross-gender titles were more common, manifested in sports, puzzle or gender-neutral titles (rollerblade racer, shooting range - note that both incorporate pink into their art for cross appeal). The few subsequent attempts at strictly female-oriented games such as Barbie tried strengthening the formula with brand names, but still didn't see the strength of sales to warrant development until much later on, with the ironically girl-popular Game Boy.

To further substantiate, note that it's no accident that the three silver-boxed games released that season were one boy, one girl and one neutral (rad racer). Nintendo's a savvy company and they knew exactly what they were doing, and this very small but specific set of releases created valuable benchmarks for years of successful licensed releases.]



AIRBALL

Can you outwit the Wizard?

Article by Brian Parker

“Now you are really in trouble,” said the evil wizard Navi, “for I am turning you into a ball and sending you into my dungeon with over 250 rooms! If that sounds easy I’m telling you it’s not, because you have a fatal slow leak and you must find a room with a pump or you will surely die! Do not pump yourself up too much or you will explode in a rubbery mess.”

In 1987 a game publisher called MichTron/Microdeal released the first version of Airball. The game featured a single screen isometric view with complex colorful graphics. As a bouncy ball you roll and jump through the levels, avoiding all types of pointy objects. The game was very quickly ported to the current computer systems including the Atari ST, Amiga, DOS, and Apple IIgs. MichTron/Microdeal wasn’t very good at promoting their products, so some versions sold much better than others. The Apple IIgs version sold only 144 copies, while the Atari ST version’s popularity earned it upgrades like an Airball Construction Set for building your own rooms.

In 1990 Atari aka Tengen (both words from the board game Go) got the li-



cense for the Airball name from MichTron, then contracted with Novotrade International to do the NES programming. Novotrade was founded in Hungary in 1983 and mainly did ports between systems. Novotrade had previously written the SEI version of Impossible Mission II for the NES, which was a port from other systems including the Apple II, DOS, and C64. Around the same time Novotrade was porting Castlevania to the Amiga. Later Novotrade would write Ecco the Dolphin for the Sega Genesis, and a few other games before being renamed to Appaloosa Interactive. As Appaloosa they created two Contra games for the PlayStation.

The game was largely completed in 1990, and scheduled for a 1991 release. The isometric view is technically challenging for the way the NES is designed. The NES hardware operates on square graphics tiles (think Dragon Warrior maps), so simulating angles is difficult. The main limit for 3D views like Airball and Marble Madness is the number of colors in an area. The backgrounds have been designed to use only 4 colors, while still looking good with shading. Other colored accents are added by using sprites, generally reserved for objects that are moving around the screen. 250+ different rooms were designed into a huge maze. Three difficulty levels were included, each one with significant changes including relocating all of the objects you are supposed to find. The Easy level can generally be fumbled through, but the Hard level requires maximum control and speed.

Somewhere along the way Tengen decided not to continue development, so the NES port was never finished. This was likely because the market for NES games was starting to fade, or be-cause of their expensive court battles with Nintendo over Tetris and the CIC lockout chip. Only one of their planned games was released after 1990. By 1994 the lawsuits were settled in Nintendo’s favor, Tengen was dissolved, and Atari had been incorporated into Time Warner. The Atari brand name has since been owned by at least 5 different companies.

For some reason the idea was started that Airball required a unique and expensive circuit board that added to the cost. This is simply not true at all. The



Screenshot: Isometric view gets more love!

The Breakdown:

Title: Airball
 Genre: Adventure
 Original release date: 1987
 Originally released by: MichTron/Microdeal
 Current release date: November 2007
 Developed by: Bunnyboy
 Purchased at: retrousb.com
 Cost: \$35

board is a standard UNROM used by around 60 USA NES games. None of the chips are anything special or expensive either.

Amazingly four known prototype boards of Airball have been found, although a fifth is rumored to exist. No direct comparisons of the carts have been made, so it is not known the order the carts were made or the completeness of each one. At least three reproductions were sold on eBay. It is not generally known which prototype was used for the repros, but it was likely from drgrafx or an earlier owner of that cart. The known pathways of the four public carts with the current owners at the end are listed on the next page.

Now you can own this great game! Available from The RetroZone (www.retrousb.com) in early November is Airball, the first new CIB NES game in over a decade. That’s right, this game includes a printed cardboard small box, in addition to the clear cart and instruction manual. The multi region Ciclone lockout chip means you can use this cart on either NTSC or PAL systems, including clones like Yobo. After 17 years you can finally outwit the Wizard!

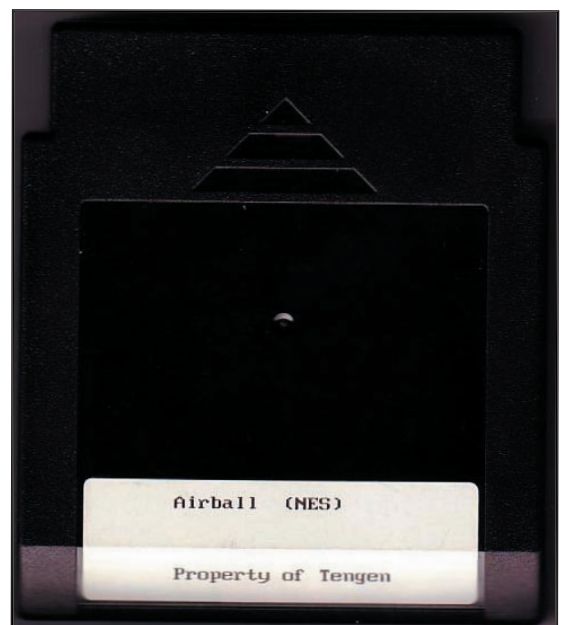
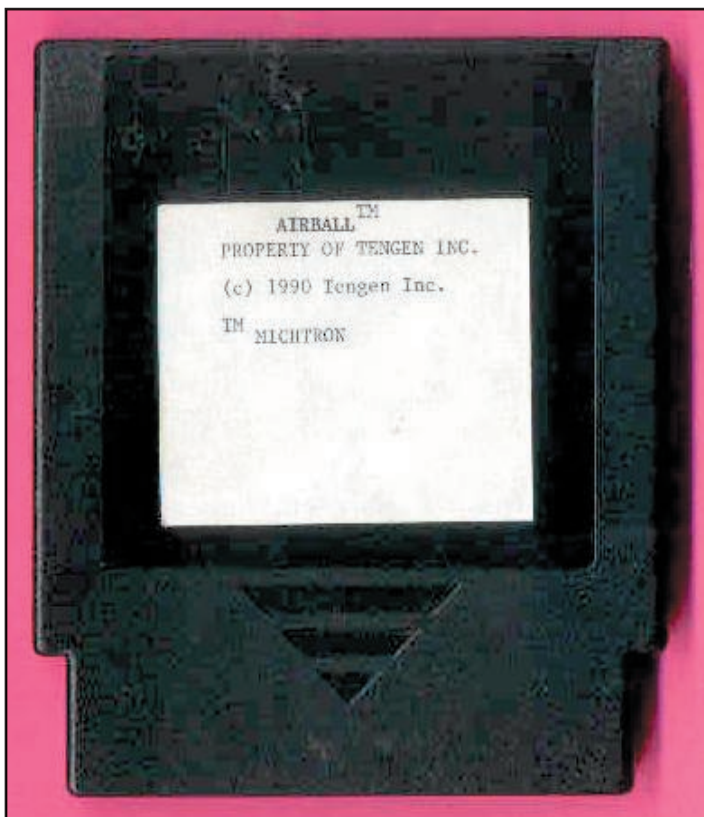
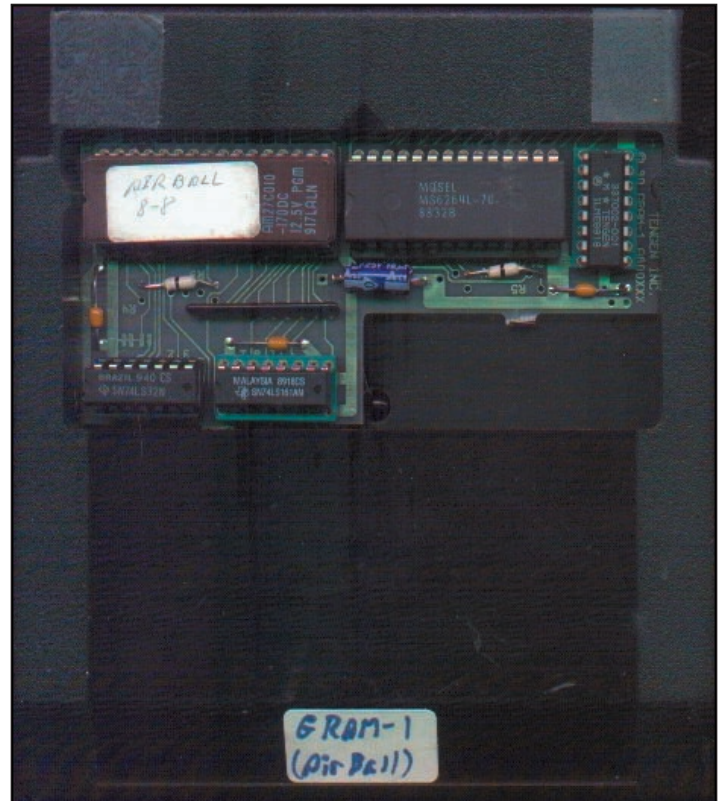
-THE PROTOTYPES-

The known pathways of the four public carts with the current owners at the end are:

nes4u -> portnoyd
record shop -> mike gedeon -> muresan
vg&ce magazine -> dreamtr
drgrafix -> daae-norway -> hounder -> starwander

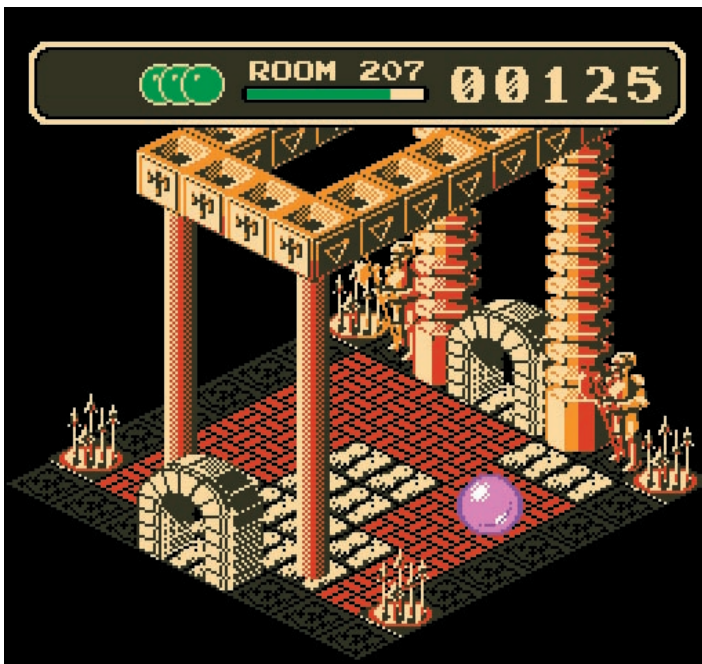


“No direct comparisons of the carts have been made, so it is not known the order the carts were made or the completeness of each one.”

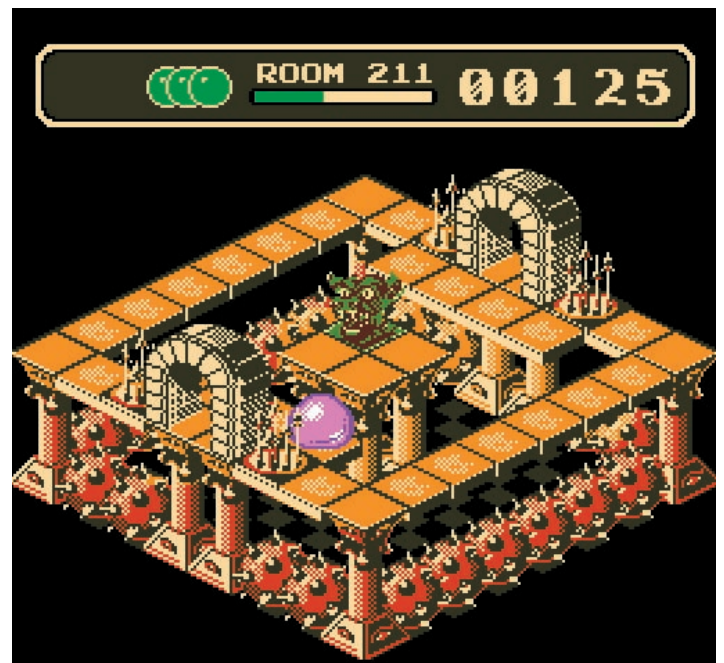


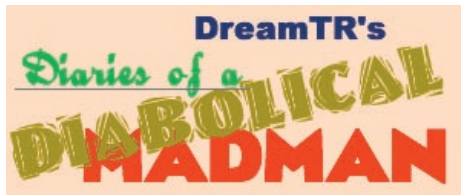


Left: Airball, as it is being released in 2007 from retrousb.com. This game includes a printed cardboard small box, in addition to the clear cart and instruction manual, not to mention the Ciclone chip inside, which allows it to be played on both NTSC and PAL systems.



More screenshots: Over two-hundred rooms await your arrival. Three difficulty settings allow you to adjust the game difficulty. One wizard stands in your way. Do you have what it takes?





Money? Who Needs It!

Article by Jason Wilson

How many times did you walk



into a department store when you were little and marvel at the video game section? Nothing can do those sections justice anymore now that the

World of Nintendo displays are no more. It was an ingenious marketing tool that captivated millions of consumers; and to the dismay of many parents I am sure, turned the word "Nintendo" into a household name. Today, everything looks so contrived and corporate; the excitement is gone. The hype of waiting for those fabulous games to be released after reading about them in Nintendo Power has now turned into a marketing machine that is more robotic than mesmerizing. The Nintendo Wii is out in stores! You would think there would be something more than just a bland console display unit for the whole world to see at

each location.

Nintendo was so "exciting" to me as an energetic 11 year old that I became jealous of my friends who had more NES games than I did. Tiger Heli, Double Dribble, Kid Icarus, and Pro Wrestling were all games I wanted, but could not have. I ended up with Kid Icarus and Zelda for Christmas, and my friend "Garbage Bag" Joe ended up with an extra game besides those (It was either Double Dribble or Ikari Warriors), and I was jealous. My friend Juan had already stolen Tiger Heli and a couple of other games from the local Zayre, so I figured, why not? Joe came over once with a plethora of games in his pants pockets. Mostly from figuring out the display cases with NES games (behind the M82 we used to play at Sears) has a cheap backing that anyone could just reach back and grab whatever they pleased! Soon he had scores of Defender II and Joust. (There was not much choice in the realm of thievery)

At Zayre, I waited around for hours until the person behind the NES display counter left. I really wanted Arkanoid, but that oversized box would have been a dead giveaway. I settled for Double Dribble. After wrestling with the game in

the toy section, I stuffed it in my pants and calmly walked out the store.

That is, until the security guard grabbed me and threw me in the back room. This was not the end, either. After my mom and stepdad came and got me from the back



Zayre: DreamTR's Nintendo dreamland. Just waiting to be heisted.

room at Zayre, I was in trouble two more times for stealing at Woolworth's, and for running off with two Game Boys with Joe while (I kid you not) both Game Boys were LINKED UP with 2 player Tetris going on. After running about a mile and thinking we got away with it, a couple of months later an officer came to the new Junior High School I was at, and needless to say, that was the last of my "stealing" days. I figure it's much better to sell stuff and use the funds to buy NES games instead! Next issue, learn how to trade 10 games (including Raid on Bungeling Bay) for Contra!



Searching For the Lost Jewels of the NES

Article by Michael Zazulak

It's the beginning of the month, which means it's time again for another installment of Hidden Treasures: Revealed, the column dedicated to showing you the games that are collecting dust in the back of your collection. The game this month is one of my favorite rentals from my childhood, Kick Master. I rented it every chance I had when it came out...I just couldn't get enough of it! The story is your typical "powerful evil force conquers the land and is holding the beautiful princess captive, and only YOU can save her and the people from the evil one's clutches" fare, but really, who plays NES games for their storylines?

GRAPHICS: 1991 was a great time for the NES, at least graphically. The sprites are drawn well, backgrounds are absolutely gorgeous, cut scenes are amazing...there really isn't much to say about the visuals here aside from "stunning."



SOUND: Kick Master has some kickin' tunes (pun absolutely intended). The best part has to be that the music is not only very well done, but also sets the mood perfectly. Sound effects are pretty ho-hum however, with nothing that really stands out, but with such excellent music, this oversight is forgivable.

GAMEPLAY: A simple left-to-right beat 'em up, and yet so much more. Once you start accumulating spells, kicks, and experience, you must start incorporating new moves into your arsenal. You

will either master them, or you won't advance. However, this is not as daunting as it sounds. If you're having difficulties, you can get your password, reset, and view your new kicks in the options menu, then re-input your password to get back into it.

OVERALL: Kick Master is easy enough to get into it, but extremely tough to finish, and very difficult to master. Both the audio and visuals are appealing, and the game is extremely fun to play. The only major downside is the password system, but even that is simply a minor personal gripe (from someone who is simply too lazy to write down the passwords).

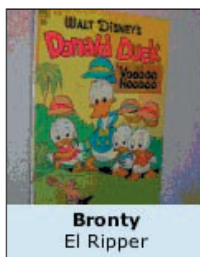


Kickmaster is an awesome game that will keep you coming back, assuming you give it a shot in the first place...so what are you waiting for? GO PLAY!

BRONTY'S BABBLINGS

Article by Dan Maresca

For my “babblings” this month, I am going to break it into two parts – the first part will be a sort of experiment seeking to corroborate/refute my thoughts from my last article with respect to the link between release dates and box rarity. The second part will touch on my perception of NES prices going forward.



To begin, I picked some titles haphazardly from the NES library from the early, mid, and late releases. I then compared the number of loose vs CIB NTSC copies on eBay, expecting the early titles to have a low ratio of CIB to loose, the mid date titles to have a higher ratio, and the late titles to have a high ratio but low number of copies overall. I included eBay store items and just typed the title into the video game category on eBay without doing a really detailed search. Obviously none of this is scientific nor is it intended to be, but its still interesting information I hope. If I got to 50 loose titles, I stopped counting both loose and CIB copies at that point.

Here are my results. (I think they bore out my surmises pretty well!). The first three are early releases, the second group of

three is from the middle of the NES’ run, and the final ones are among the last titles to be produced.

For the second part of my article this month I would like to share my thoughts on the future of the hobby with respect to prices. People often ask me about this topic, and in participating in one of the threads this month I took the opportunity to kind of put together my thoughts on it in a cohesive form.

Overall, I think we’re in for more increases for a while and then a plateau and possibly even a period of “correction.” Every market has highs and lows, especially when you’re talking about eBay sales (which of course are where most of the better NES material is traded), so NES stuff won’t be immune and will experience market swings like other collectibles.

On the whole though, I don’t think things are getting cheaper anytime soon on top-quality material. The fundamentals for the video game market as a collectible are really strong. There’s an *enormous* population of people who enjoyed and fondly remembered these games. Even if only 1% of those people, or even .001% of those people ever collect its still a staggering number and more than enough for a vibrant market).

More to the point, the collecting population is generally young and starting to make more money all the time as they get “real” jobs. I know of at least two board members that got significant raises at work this year, and I’m sure there are many, many more.

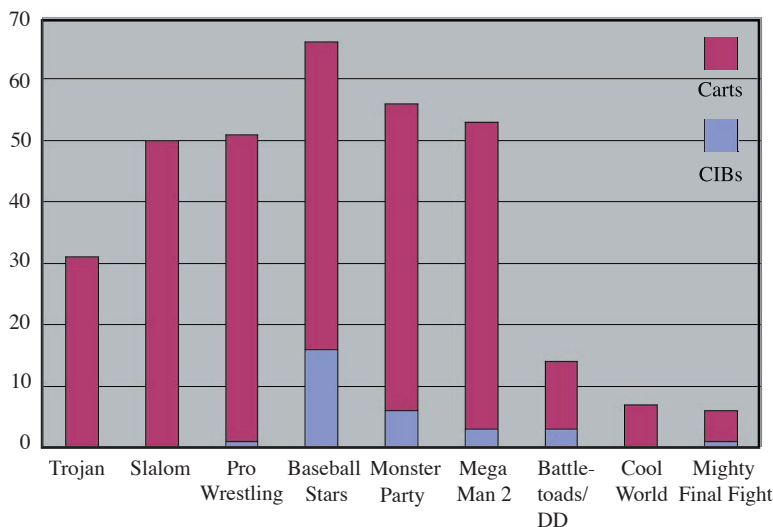
All of that ends up being more money to chase the good stuff, and all or virtually all of us on this board are nowhere close to our peak earning years - i.e. 40 to 60 yrs of age. There’s a lot of income potential left to tap. Add to that the fact that

home video games are still, today, hugely popular, and you have a market that could be popular for the next fifty years or more and enjoy a run similar to, or better than, comics, cards, etc. The NES and Super NES especially (and to a lesser extent the playstation, one could fairly argue) are the creative wellspring of today’s video games. Most of the big franchises originated on those consoles, and will therefore have a large potential audience of interested collectors.

The only question in my mind is will people care about collecting tangible copies or will they settle for digital copies? So far, we’ve seen emulators and now the virtual console around for years and it hasn’t seemed to matter, but I suppose that could change. I see that as being really the only long term reason why rare games *wouldn’t* be worth great money in future years. Otherwise it seems like a foregone conclusion with the fundamental market already in place. Collecting, at the end of the day, for a huge amount of people, starts with buying back the fun memories you had when you were 12 (what were the first games you bought? Betcha it’s the ones you had as a kid. Wanting that Myriad 6-in-1 comes later).

Our fathers read comics and bought sports cards. The current generation played video games... end of story. If they start to collect something, what is it going to be? The comic book they never read or the video game they spent 40 hours on? In my particular case I was in that in-between generation, so I can appreciate both sets of collectibles, but there is no doubting that kids play games now at the expense of those other activities. And what you’re into when you’re a kid affects what you collect, for a huge number of people. The examples of collectibles going up in value around the 25 year mark, i.e. once those kids are paying adults with real jobs, are...well, myriad.

Strap in and hang on because I think it’s going to be a wild ride to go from where we are today to where we might be in five, ten, twenty years. Our collective knowledge as collectors of NES material and video games in general has so much further to go, and the new knowledge we uncover will shape what becomes desirable later on. Lord knows I never thought I’d pay good money for a copy of Athletic World!





How long have you been a serious NES hobbyist? What's kept you in for so long?

Dain: I've been a NES hobbyist on and off for approximately 8 years. I started collecting, like many, by reminiscing about the fun times I had as a kid playing for hours on end. I'm one of the original owners, getting my NES the first Christmas season it was released. It was only when I started a job that paid decent that I felt compelled to acquire all the games I never got to play as a kid.

The thrill of the hunt is part of what keeps me going, but even more than that it's the undying need to catalog everything ever released for the NES. As anyone who's been around a while knows, this is a near-impossible feat. Not one to back down from the impossible, I knew that we needed a site that brought together NES collectors from around the world.

What are some fascinating things you've uncovered as you've explored the NES hobby? How about the biggest disappointment?

Dain: The most fascinating (and disappointing) thing I've uncovered as I've explored the NES hobby is *people*. I realize that may not be what you were after with this question, but it's a reality for me and one of the reasons I've kept NA going when, at times, I've felt like giving up. I've encountered so many people from all over the world, and have uncovered so many new friends in the process. Frankly, I've never had this many friends before and people I enjoy sharing my time with.

When I speak of disappointment, it's really more or less that I've learned so much about human nature that I hadn't realized before, being in a position, like it or not, where I've had to take a leadership role. I catch myself living an imaginary pipe dream, hoping for a utopian community where everyone gets along and shares in the same principles that I believe in. Alas, different strokes for different folks, where

The Man Behind NintendoAGE Pulls Back the Curtain (a little)

with one person could be content, another takes great offense. It has taken me some trips down *Swallowed Pride Lane* to come to terms with *people simply being people*, and that I have to walk a finer line of responsibility being in a leadership position.

Word association! For every word, name the first NES game that springs to mind:

Complex:	Solomon's Key
Polished:	Blaster Master
Funky:	Pugsley's Scavenger Hunt
Unplayable:	Dragon's Lair
Quick:	3-D WorldRunner

How has the Internet and personal computing changed the hobby, in your perception?

Dain: Without the Internet and PC's, our hobby would be crippled in many respects. We wouldn't have an accurate picture of rarity, for one. It would also be tough to know which games existed, especially on a global scale – people want to know how far they've come and how far they need to go. This keeps collectors interested, and is also why the topic of what constitutes a "complete collection" comes up so frequently. It's human nature to *need* to know how many more miles you must travel to make it to the end. The part that we try to shelter new collectors from (evil laugh) is that there really is no end!

The Internet is the sole reason why this hobby has blossomed the way it has. 10 years ago, Mike Etlar built a rarity guide based on his personal knowledge as a storeowner. Really, *think* about that for a moment. If you look back on it, that was an *amazing* feat in 1997. At that time, the Internet as we know it was in its infancy. We now know that many of the rarities in his guide aren't up-to-date or even accurate, and a few of the games were never even released, but he accomplished something at a time when the Internet wasn't as helpful of a tool.

What will 2008 bring for NintendoAGE?

Dain: 2008 is going to be a *very* exciting year for NA, as we will unleash a host of new toys for our members to tinker with. When I sat down and started working on the next version, the first thing I asked myself is, "How can I *keep* our members on the site longer?" Simply put, I want you to lose yourself on the site, pissing off the wife or girlfriend in the process (after not realizing you have been logged in for hours on end :) To accomplish this, we needed to build our *own* community, in-house; facets of collecting exist all over the place and need a central-

To illustrate this, just take a quick poll of how many members have an account

on PhotoBucket, YouTube, ZoomShare, Blogger, GameTZ, eBay and/or any other site that offers tools that are either free or used frequently for collecting: just about *everyone*. "Wouldn't it be cool for all of this to be available on one site?" The answer is yes – I want to give people all of that, but in a unified way so they can manage it all in one place. NA now gives its members a personalized web space called a "Game Room" that allows them to host images, videos, a full-blown website with custom pages, links, and a blog-style home page. This is the first phase. The next phase will introduce personalized storefronts, a feedback system, a transaction system and other tools to help members manage their collections.

This is just the tip of the iceberg – there are so many other minor features in the works as well, many of which are nearing completion...



Just one new feature: The re-designed, official NintendoAGE logo, designed by dangevin.

What aspect of the site are you working on currently, and when will we see it active?

Dain: Right now, I'm working on the transaction system for members to interact with other members, integrating that into a feedback system as well as making some much-needed forums modifications to make everyone's life a bit easier. There are various "pieces" of features done, but it's the way they interact with each other that's taking considerable time.

How about 2018? What long-term landmarks and goals can we hope to achieve?

Dain: This is a great question, and a tough one to answer. I envision NintendoAge becoming more than the sum of its parts, a place where collectors of all systems converge to share in

this way of life (ahem, I mean hobby). Let me be very clear: I want to be the Google of video game sites. I hope to create a true marketplace that thrives on its own, providing an alternative to sites like eBay. I also see NA becoming a fully self-sustained sight where there are literally hundreds of "builders" that step up to the plate to create and manage their respective areas – it simply can't be done by one person, and I hope to bring enough tools together to allow our members to build and create their own universe, one game at a time.

Anything else you'd like to share?

Dain: On a personal note, people have wondered what the future of NA will be once my daughter Jarah is born in November 2007. Because web

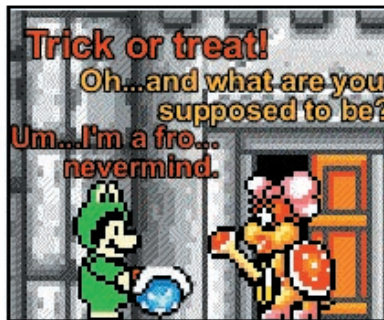
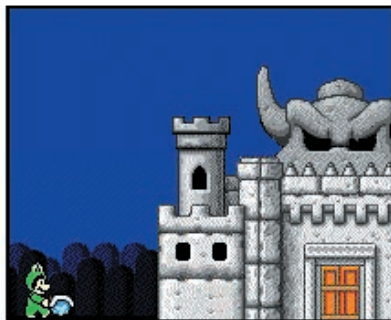
programming is what I do for a living, much of what I build is transferable to, or obtained (in part) from, projects I work on at my full-time job. This affords me a unique luxury of making progress on both fronts simultaneously. I know my workplace has been very happy with some of the media and AJAX tools I developed for NA that they, in turn, get to use in their products. It's a win-win situation. Think of NA as a Guinea Pig for new ideas that my company's conservative products cannot afford to experiment with. I wanted to mention this because new development **will not cease** once the little one arrives :)

[Editors note: Thanks to dangevin for coming up with the questions for this interview, and thanks to Dain for revealing some of the secrets. We're all extremely excited!]



Want to contribute?

Everyone is welcome to submit a comic or fanart. We, of course, can't promise that it will be used, but you never know.



The Future of NintendoAGE a breakdown

Site Layout & Visual Changes

100% complete
Fall/Winter, 2007

- New site-wide styles.
- Integration of the new NA logo.

Forums Modifications

90% complete
Fall/Winter, 2007

- Style integration with the primary site.
- Bug fixes and user-requested modifications.
- New editor that supports HTML syntax instead of bulletin syntax

Content Tools

100% complete
Fall/Winter, 2007

- Personal site – includes blog, content pages, footer pages
- Media – includes image bucket and video bucket, both with "albums"

Personalization

75% complete
Fall/Winter, 2007

- Customizable "experience" settings (ie, search settings, region settings, etc).
- Email, mailing address, and PayPal address management for trades, sales, etc.

User Tools

- Collection tool - 50% complete -Late 2007/Early 2008*
- eBay tools - 20% complete - Early/Mid 2008

Other

- Many other features (some hidden) I won't list here... you'll just have to stay tuned!

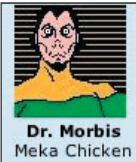
** The collection tool depended on a complete re-design of our data model. The new data model will be released first as part of phase 1. If all goes as planned, the collection tool will be released shortly thereafter.*



Strap On Your Skates ...

Article by Basil Timmins

Being that I'm Canadian, and seeing as how hockey is the greatest sport known to man, (don't even try to argue with me on that point) I thought I would take the opportunity to pit the NES's two heavyweights in the field against each other: Ice Hockey and Blades of Steel in a knock-em-down, drag-em-out match. Now this isn't going to be an easy victory for whichever game comes out on top, as they both certainly have their own clear strengths and weaknesses. But there can be only one "best hockey game on the NES" and we're darn well going to find out what it is. It'll be a battle of the titans, a clash to the max, a war to end all... well whatever; you get the idea; on with the review.



Graphics: Here we go. As much as I hate to rate any game in such a superficial context, it must be said that a well designed graphic theme set can give a game that little bit of extra character that can make the difference between being "just" great and being a truly bona fide classic. Well, in this category, these two games took very different paths. Blades of Steel aimed for "realism" (I know it sounds funny saying this about an 8bit NES title all these years later, but hey, that's what they were shooting for at the time) while Ice Hockey went for the cutesy or cartoony look. The question is: which is better? In 1989 I'm sure I and all my friends would've said Blades of Steel looked better, hands down. But upon playing these games again here in the present, I'm really not so sure. The problem is that realistic graphics age terribly, while their cartoony counterparts seem to look vibrant forever – since they're detached from reality, it's almost as if they are frozen in time. Ice Hockey doesn't look "old" to me – it looks as lively today as it did all those years back in the day. Blades of Steel's graphics, on the other hand, just look tired. Judge's ruling: Ice Hockey.

Sound: Now here's where BoS makes a comeback. Sure I like the little ditty that plays all throughout Ice Hockey, and especially the tune it belts out when the zambonis are cleaning the ice, but it has nothing, and I mean NOTHING on its counterpart's audio. From the moment you load up BoS, your ears are in for a treat. I'd be surprised if there is one single reader out there who cannot recollect its well-worded welcoming line. "Blades – *shink* – of Steel." The background music is great stuff too, and I still have fun trying to figure out just what the announcer is saying when you pass the puck to a teammate – is it "hits the pass" or "it's the pass" or "gets the pass" or what? Ah well, this is Konami after all, and when it comes to NES music, they are second to none. Judge's ruling: Blades of Steel.

Play Mechanics: This one, as far as I'm concerned, is no contest. In Ice Hockey your players are versatile and their movements are fluid; they are very easy to control no matter what you are trying to do. But in BoS this all falls apart. First of all, your players move like billiard balls, bouncing around off the boards and every player imaginable as they randomly cascade down the rink. But even that I could live with if not for one terrible glitch: if you stand in the slot with the puck and just sit there, your opponent cannot touch you without surrendering a penalty shot. But even worse than that, with that arrow on the net showing right where every shot taken is going to go, trying to score against any half-experienced human opponent becomes a method to madness. As a result, your two player games all end up being scoreless before long. Judge's ruling: Ice Hockey.

One Player Mode: This one's easy – Ice Hockey lets you play one exhibition game against the computer-controlled team of your choice and... and... that's it. BoS lets you play through a (rather limited) single-elimination tournament, after which you are named champions if you've come out on top. BoS comes back again. Judge's ruling: Blades of Steel.

Two Player Mode: As mentioned above, any and all games of BoS played between two experienced human players will *always* end up being a 0-0 tie and go straight to a shoot-out, and that, my friends, is not very fun. Ice hockey's two player mode, meanwhile, is fantastic. With

fast-paced action that can get really frenetic (gotta love those goalie-less overtime periods!) this is where Ice Hockey really, really shines. Judge's ruling: Ice Hockey.

Options/Customizability: Ice Hockey shines here too. While BoS doesn't really let you do much more than choose your team and decide whether it's going to be a 1 player or 2 player game, Ice Hockey pulls out all the bells and whistles. You get to select the team, game speed, period length, and most importantly, the physical attributes of all four players (and yes this makes a difference as fatsos can't win face-offs against skinny guys to save their lives). You can even switch the player's positions prior to the puck drop. No contest here. Judges ruling: Ice Hockey.

Overall Presentation: I've got to hand it to BoS in this category. That game has a lot of intangible stuff that really overshadows the faulty play mechanics so that you and a buddy can still have a good time. From the aforementioned speech synthesis to the game advertisements to the in-game fights to the mini game of Gradius on the scoreboard between periods, this game seems to have it all. Ice Hockey is pretty standard once you get past the title screen, but BoS takes it a step further and makes you feel like you are in the arena (insofar as



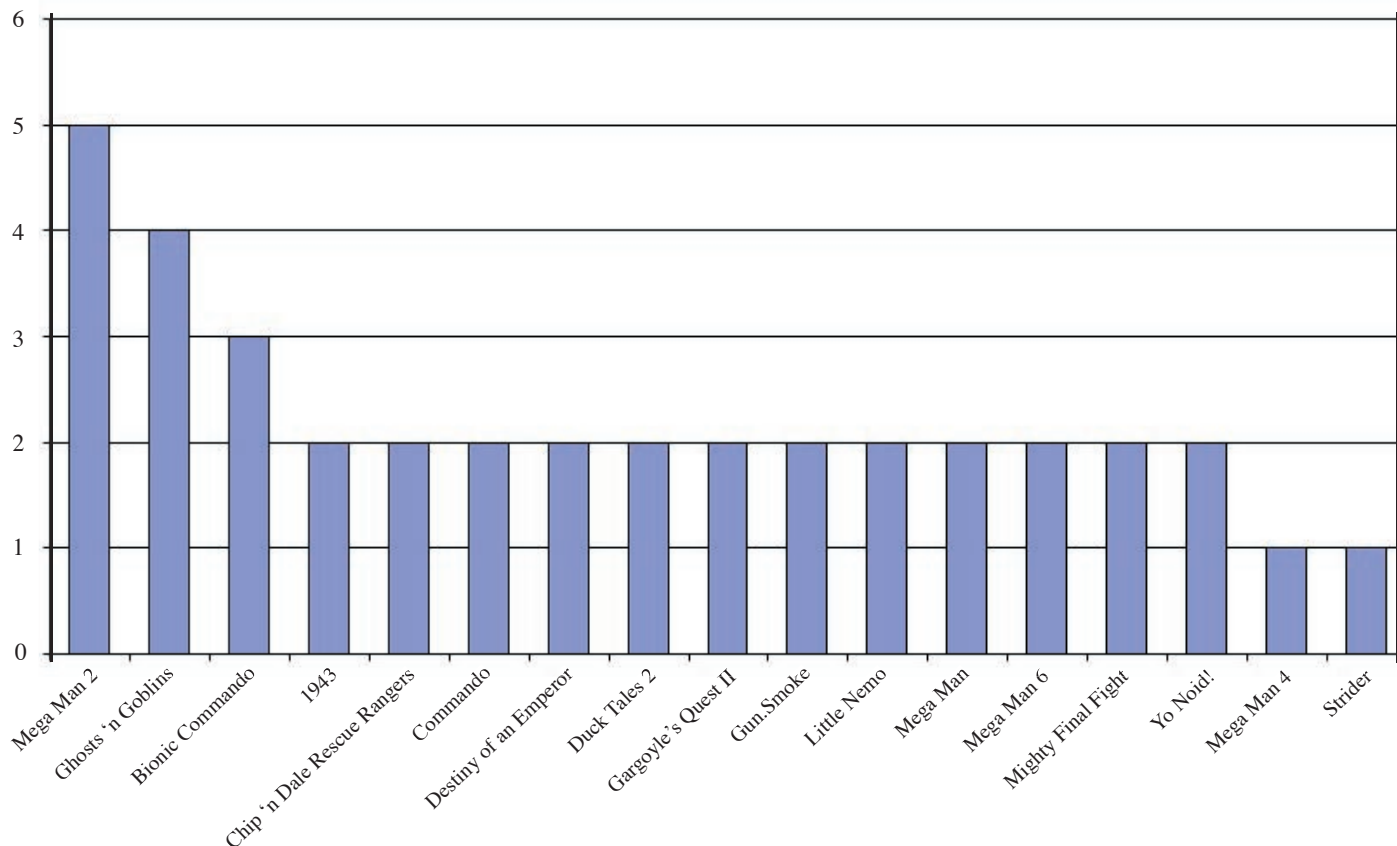
any NES game is capable of that). Judge's ruling: Blades of Steel.

Final Verdict: Well it's been a tough match, but in the end I've got to give it to Ice Hockey. To my mind, tight, solid play control trumps eye candy, ear candy, and any other intangible you can throw on the screen, every last lingering time. Both games are fun, but Ice Hockey provides gamers with a fun (and fair) two player challenge with great play mechanics and, as such, is the best hockey game on the NES. Go Poland!

Want to participate?

Be sure to check the 'Help Wanted' thread in the forums.

The Results: What is your favorite Capcom NES title?



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