

Geek Corner: The sad saga of EGM

By JAMES COUCHE
STAFF WRITER
JTC5101@PSU.EDU

For 20 years, Electronic Gaming Monthly (EGM) was a driving force in the world of video game journalism that helped shape the industry as we know it... WAS being the operative term. On January 6, 2009 EGM was unceremoniously cancelled, just shy of its twentieth anniversary, after a year of hard times. The void that it leaves has created a sense of uncertainty for the future of hard-copy video game publications, which are slowly being overtaken by their internet counterparts.

IN THE BEGINNING

EGM's beginnings were humble to say the least. It all started in 1987 when high school dropout/video game enthusiast Steve Harris set out to create his own video game publication—Electronic Game Player. The little magazine that couldn't was put to rest after a mere four issues, but not before gaining Harris some positive attention from some important people...

with money. With investment money from these important people, Harris was given another opportunity to fulfill his dream and in May of 1989, EGM issue one was released.

CREATING AN IDENTITY

In the early days of video game journalism, most gamers had three choices: Nintendo Power, Nintendo Power and Nintendo Power. The lack of competition made it relatively easy to break into the market and EGM, and a few other publications, took advantage of that. As time went on and the popularity of video games exploded, the field became a lot more crowded and staying relevant, and in business, became much more difficult. While Nintendo Power beefed up its presentation and Gamepro tried to play it cool, EGM tried something considerably more novel—adding personality.

Taking inspiration from Japanese gaming magazine Famitsu, EGM put their staff front and center and allowed them the freedom to put their unique personalities into the magazine, not just in their writing but with monthly profiles on what they were doing,

games they were playing, and what they were thinking. This new approach led to more humor and allowed readers to attach themselves to an editor they identified with. In some cases the writers became more interesting than the games they were writing about.

The added freedom allowed for more original content, some of which was far riskier than what other gaming magazines were doing. The best example of this was the annual April Fool's joke, a tradition that started in 1991 and lasted until EGM's final days. The most infamous joke to appear in the magazine is the legendary Sheng Long prank for Street Fighter 2. In order to unlock Sheng Long, Ken and Ryu's master, players were required to perform nearly impossible tasks throughout

the game before finally going ten rounds with M. Bison without hitting him or getting hit; after the tenth round, Sheng Long was said to appear and destroy Bison before challenging (see: schooling) you. What made this joke so infamous wasn't just the fact that it was just plain cruel, but the fact that people fell for it twice. With the release of Street Fighter 3, the joke was pulled out of retirement to punish gullible readers a second time and much anger and hilarity ensued. Ironically, Sheng Long is set to be a playable character in the upcoming Street Fighter 4 (not a joke).

Despite the tradition of shenanigans, EGM worked hard to create a reputation for journalistic integrity, another innovation in the field, that earned the respect of the gaming industry as well as serious controversy. The magazine had a policy of only reviewing complete retail versions of games unlike other publications

that would sometimes jump the gun and review almost-final versions, which sometimes led to embarrassing mistakes (I'm looking at you Game Informer). The editors would also stand by their reviews and opinions, regardless of how unpopular they were; this led to pulled advertisements, angry game developers, and even subscription cancellations. Despite the pressure, EGM and its staff stood by their words and the industry admired them for it.

Over the years, EGM's successful formula helped it continue to grow and eventually it expanded to the internet. 1up.com served as the perfect expansion of the magazine by adding podcasts, videos and the full-fledged internet series the 1Up Show. The 1Up Show was billed as a response to G4 Tech TV's "watered down" focus on video games and starred the magazine staff, most of whom had achieved a small level of celebrity at this point. The popularity of the 1Up Show led to spinoffs such as the aptly titled Not the 1Up Show and Broken Pixels, a show in which bad games are savaged by EGM editors.

THE END?

Despite its popularity, EGM was not invincible. Print media is on borrowed time these days and the current economic recession is making that time tick away a lot faster. In March of 2008, parent company Ziff-Davis filed for Chapter 11 Bankruptcy protection and was looking to make cuts to stay afloat. EGM and 1Up weren't bringing in the money to justify their production costs, so they had to go. In January of 2009, both publications were bought by the Hearst Corporation and handed to their online component UGO who chose to terminate EGM and scale back 1Up (see: fire a lot of people). After nearly 20 years, one of the most well respected gaming magazines died an unceremonious death.

While EGM is gone and 1Up is a pale shadow of its former self, many of the alumni are still hard at work. New sites like eat.sleep.game and area5 TV are attempting to keep the EGM style alive.

Ryu • Ken
Chun Li
E. Honda
Blanka • Zangief
Guile • Dhalsim
Balrog • Vega
Sagat • M. Bison

Fei Long
Abel • Gouken
Sakura • Dan
Rose • Gen
Seth • Cammy
Rufus • El Fuerte
C. Viper • Akuma

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT

STREET FIGHTER IV

Online details • Character breakdowns
Most-wanted/least-wanted DLC • In-depth opinions • A letter from SF4's producer
An EGM and Street Fighter retrospective

U.S. National Video Game Team's

ELECTRONIC GAMING MONTHLY

ALL ABOUT
NINTENDO SEGA ATARI
VIDEO GAMES
Plus... the Software and Arcade Games

May, 1989

OUR EXCLUSIVE
NINTENDO PREVIEW

We Review and Preview All the HOT New

NINTENDO GAMES:

F.O.W.
OPERATION WOLF
1942
ULTRA
ROBOCOP
BAD DUCKS
SUPER MARIO
BUBBLE BOBBLE
HYDLER
STARMAN
SUPER SPRINT
Plus Many More...

SPECIAL PICK-UP PREVIEW...

3.95 - 4.95 CANADA