

THAT WAS NOW, THIS IS THEN

BY MIKE PLASKET

We were all kids once. Keep that in mind as I recall an unfortunate decision I once made, and feel free to laugh at my tragicomedy. However, if you, the reader, made the same mistake I did, then join me in bittersweet reminiscence.

My only excuse is that I was blinded by that cat. That darn cat.

I was an avid reader of *Nintendo Power* back when it covered the NES, Super NES, and GameBoy; the systems I had grown up with. I was also somewhat shallow in these days and mostly sprung for games that looked cool. Oh, how I wanted a particular title covered in *Nintendo Power*'s special fiftieth issue. It just looked so cool, so chic, and so colorful. I would have been a fool had I not snagged it.

Or so I thought. It turned out that I was a fool for shelling out far more money than I should have for it. Oh, the ignorance of youth. What was the game in question? I could just keep prolonging this particular paragraph just to be sadistic. Or maybe I'm just stalling because I'm afraid to owe up to my own demons and mention what the game was.



"What could possibly go wrong?"

BUBSY. IT WAS BUBSY. ARE YOU HAPPY NOW?

For those of you lucky enough to be unaware of the existence of *Bubsy*, I apologize for tainting your brain with an explanation. *Bubsy* was a semi-failed attempt at marketing an anthropomorphic mascot from the unremarkable game producer Accolade. After Sonic and his attitude caught on, a myriad of laughable rip-offs were spawned, and as you can probably guess, none of them reached the same peak that Sonic attained. The festival of failures includes such sad sacks as *Awesome Possum*, *Aero the Acro-bat*, and *Mr. Nutz*, whose games ranged from mediocre to super-sucky. Others had fine games that didn't become as famous as Sonic's but garnered some success, such as *Sparkster*, *Dynamite Headdy*, and *Ristar*.

Bubsy the cat landed somewhere between the two ends of the spectrum, as his game wasn't very good. However, he still achieved some recognition due to the amount of advertising and magazine coverage his game received. One such opportunity to pitch his game was the momentous fiftieth issue of *Nintendo Power*, and as a result, a surprising amount of copies were sold of *Bubsy: Claws Encounters of the Furred Kind*. Let that inane and cheesy title sink in. If you're still trying to get over how laughably bad it is, I can wait.

I was one of the many suckers who succumbed to style, as it looked like a competent game from its screenshots. I bought it for a price that eludes me, perhaps because I've blocked it from memory to protect my fragile self. As the game began, *Bubsy* asked "What could possibly go wrong?" in a casual tone. It was an attempt to reach out and identify with me. It worked, and I jumped right into the action. Five seconds later, I was squished by a *Cheese Wheel O' Doom™*, which was coincidentally the name of the first level.

Back then, I was thinking, *Wow! They promised Cheese Wheels O' Doom™, and they delivered!* I had the highest hopes for this game, and I didn't stop to realize that death was frequent to the point of cheapness. I recall being drowned, smashed by oncoming trolleys, and knocked over by a meandering *Woolie* (the main antagonists of the game) far too often in the first level alone. Another glaring issue was that *Bubsy* could take a single hit before losing a life. While that makes games like *Contra* and *Space Harrier* more challenging, it made *Bubsy* more frustrating that it should have been.

But I didn't notice, because I liked this game. I was told to like this game. I was... tricked into liking this game! *Bubsy* himself was just so very full of personality (or "purr-sonality", as Accolade's ads claimed) and had a cute animation for just about everything. I was led astray by that funny feline, and I couldn't see that the game I was playing was a steaming pile. I was a victim of a unique type of design that's horrible and appealing at the same time, and I was oblivious to it.

So when did I start to realize that it sucked harder than a porn star named "Blast Vacuum?" Well, I don't quite know, but something in my subconscious told me to be wary when *Bubsy II* was released. I wanted to find out how it compared to the original, so I decided to rent it. It didn't captivate me quite as much as the original game, and so I never bought it. Around the same time, I began to see the numerous faults of the original, and I came back to it to see how it stacked up to

the sequel. I still liked it for sentimental reasons, but the more I played, the more screwy it seemed. I never really had a sudden suckiness-revealing epiphany, though. It was more like a faint bitter taste that lingered in my senses for a long time and increased in strength as I grew wiser.

When I play *Bubsey* nowadays, its flaws stand out more than purple spandex at a death metal concert. It's too easy to die, it can be awkward to attack enemies, the stage layouts are haphazard, the same generic type of boss attacks you at the end of every three levels, and the Bubster's quips became grating on the nerves. But there's a small part within me that still remembers fondly how much I enjoyed this laughably bad title. I have rarely ever sold a game, and I still have my original copy of *Bubsey*. Part of the reason is because I want to appease the kid in me. A few of the cat's charms still bring a subdued smile to my face, even though I blush a little every time this happens.

While I keep *Bubsey* around for sentimental reasons, I also retain it as punishment for the error I made. I'm no longer blinded by an avatar with a cheesy personality specifically tailored to connect with the player. When there are valiant heroes like the Belmonts, badass bounty hunters like Samus Aran, or tough ninjas like Strider Hiryu, *Bubsey* just doesn't register as a character that any self-respecting gamer would want to control. I keep him around to let me know just how much of a fool I was.

Still, no matter how much I bash myself for the choice I made, I can't deny that I did have some good times with *Bubsey*. It was just corny fun, and that's still the vibe I get from it today.

*Written by Mike Plasket. This excerpt from the book *Memoirs of a Virtual Caveman* is © 2008, 2014 SCAR Productions. Please do not distribute without the author's permission. Direct all inquiries to Rob Strangman at gradiusone@yahoo.com*

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