



# THE OPCFG INTERVIEW WITH MARTIN ALESSI

*The following is a short excerpt from The OPCFG Interview with Martin Alessi as it appears in the book Memoirs of a Virtual Caveman.*

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**Rob:** How'd you get into journalism?

**Martin:** I always loved to write and spread the news about video games. When I was younger I wrote, designed and published a video game newsletter with my grade school friends Ray Price and Paul Ojeda called the *Nintendo/Konami Elite Player's Club Newsletter*. We used old fashioned paste up and photocopied screens from early *Famitsu* magazines to scoop even the biggest U.S. magazines. This very newsletter landed me a job at Sendai Publishing and eventually I was able to get Ray and Paul jobs there as well.

**Rob:** How did you land the gig at *Electronic Gaming Monthly*?

**Martin:** I was working for a local electronic store called CK electronics in the summer of 1989. The owner invited me to come to CES with him and he had to sneak me in as I was only 16 at the time. It was one of the most amazing moments of my life and it only got better when I met David White, Associate Publisher at the Sendai Publishing booth. I expressed to him how much I loved *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (which was only on its second issue) and showed him my newsletter. He was so impressed he asked me if I would like a job answering calls as a game counselor for FCI. I started working for Sendai a few weeks later and by the end of the summer I had moved up as to Associate Editor for *Electronic Gaming Monthly*. Mainly, I was helping to capture pictures of the games and even got to write my first nationally published reviews which were featured in issue 5.

**Rob:** I would have given my left arm to go to a CES back then. I remember seeing *Electronic Gaming Monthly's* coverage of games from the various CES shows down through the years, several of which never made it onto store shelves, to our disappointment. Did you ever get to play any games that showed real promise that ended up never being released? And did you ever get any of them to keep for yourself?

**Martin:** I'm sure I played a few prototypes that never made it but I really can't recall any specifics at the moment other than Sunsoft *Batman* for NES that was loosely based on the 1989 movie with Michael Keaton. It had cinema displays with more story to it and graphics that never made it into the final release. The only unreleased prototype I have the fortune of owning is a Nintendo licensed (yes licensed) version of Tengen *Tetris*. This copy of *Tetris* was sent to the magazine before the infamous lawsuit between Nintendo and Tengen. It is the crown jewel of my collection.

**Rob:** How was import coverage handled at *Electronic Gaming Monthly* back then? Was there a Japanese correspondent, or did you guys just take regular trips there and come back with new games and info?

**Martin:** A little of both actually. We had several Japanese correspondents and our Editor, Ed Semrad would take trips every other month or so depending what tradeshow or special industry event was happening. Once in a while he would pick one of us to accompany him on his trip and I got to go, not once but twice! Talk about the experience of a life time! To be in Japan during what I consider to be the golden age of gaming, as it was happening, was something I will never forget or take for granted. I still have games in my collection from those trips.

**Rob:** I'm actually very jealous of you right now. I've yet to visit Japan, but I'm dying to go. To go during the golden age, though? WOW. What was it like over there at the time? Have any memories of the trips you'd like to share?



*John Greiner of Hudson Soft introduces Martin to the world of sushi and Japanese beer in Sapporo, Japan! (March 1992)*

**Martin:** It was absolutely magical! We were given the tour of some of the smaller gaming shops in Shinjuku by *Electronic Gaming Monthly's* own David

Siller, who knew Japan like the back of his hand. Imagine walking through a little alley and up a narrow staircase to find a shop filled with just about every Famicom, Super Famicom, PC Engine, Mega Drive all discounted for the taking. Some of my favorite memories are shopping in Shinjuku and Akihabara for a Super Famicom and SuperGrafx systems and all the launch games. I also remember being blown away by the arcade culture there. As the U.S. arcades gravitated towards redemption games, Japanese arcade were filled with shooters and platformers and players with considerable skill. I remember distinctly watching a young Japanese lady perfectly play through *Xexex* (a rare shooter like *R-Type*) from Konami on only one life!

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*Written by Rob Strangman. 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 at [gradiusone@yahoo.com](mailto:gradiusone@yahoo.com)*

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