



THE OPCFG INTERVIEW WITH DAVID SILLER

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

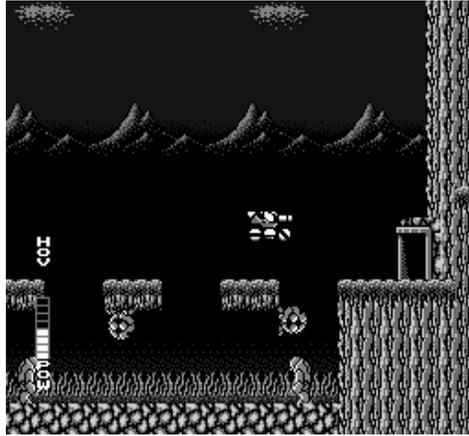
Rob: There was a major shift in the quality of Sunsoft's games, from average to fantastic, right about the time *Blaster Master* was released. Any idea why this shift happened? Did they hire new programmers or something?

David: Development is like anything, the more you work with it the better it gets. The early stuff was exploratory. The later stuff, like *Blaster Master*, *Gimmick!*, *Battle Formula*, and *Dynamite Batman* utilized Sunsoft's 5B and FME-7 chips added into the cartridges that allowed for more sprites and additional features to the program presentation. Konami also did this with their later stuff.

Rob: Apparently Nintendo of America had a policy of not allowing their third-party manufacturers to use custom chips in their NES releases, but rather forced them to use Nintendo's own MMC series chips. What kind of hassle was it when dealing with Nintendo of America over these chips?

David: It was a major pain and required a lot more time to reprogram various aspects of the game further delaying the schedule. It certainly affected what we were hoping to do with the game and is a reason that it was not as good as it could have been. The MMC3 could digitally split up the screen easily for separate displays and was a good chip. but Nintendo of America was a bitch to work with since they **never** compromised. If you didn't do what they said, you didn't release that game. Later they restricted companies to only five game releases per year. They were very arrogant and had a monopoly that was contested in the courts. This was another factor that killed the NES, which they wanted to do anyway.

Rob: As I understand it, *Blaster Master* wasn't popular in Japan (where it was released under the title *Chou-Wakusei Senki MetaFight*), but it was certainly a smash hit in America. Any idea why it wasn't as popular in Japan as it was here?



Blaster Master (NES, 1988)

David: *Blaster Master* was a hit in the U.S. more so than in Japan because at that time U.S. players wanted a newer or better action game experience. Japanese players were still into the "me too" syndrome or games that were similar to popular games but a little different. Also RPG's started to dominate in Japan as early action games were too tough for the mass appeal audience. Regarding *Blaster Master*, it wasn't the marketing in the U.S. that succeed, as that only helps make customers aware of what is out there. The proof was in playing a game with some depth and unique features that other games didn't have.

In Japan, the earlier Sunsoft games were popular because the themes were more to the liking of that culture: farmers, fantasy heroes, etc. They were simpler to play and understand for children playing in a dark bedroom while kneeling in front of their small TV's. Most companies outside of Namco and Konami would always "short" the market to insure sell through. Japan companies do not like to have any leftover stock, not even one!

Rob: What role did you play in *Blaster Master*'s localization?

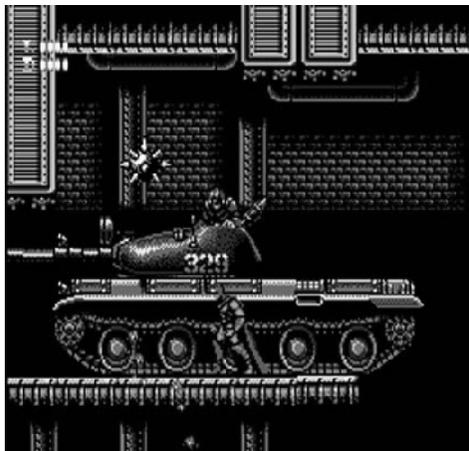
David: I didn't have a hand in the original *Blaster Master*, but was involved in *Blaster Master 2*. The biggest problem with *Blaster Master 2* is that the development time was so very short. Management is always dragging their feet to greenlight a development project and then they want it tomorrow! This often placed extreme pressure on me to deliver in a very short time period.

Rob: I know Sunsoft had the rights to *Superman* for a while, apparently lost them, and the *Superman* NES game that was in the works was retooled as *Sunman*. Then it was canceled. What happened there?

David: We sometimes used other studios, such as the one headed by the late Kenji Eno, whose studio in Tokyo developed *Sunman*. I was involved with that project which was intended to be a *Superman* game, but Eno and I could not agree on direction and he didn't understand the culture of *Superman*. Unfortunately, this contract allowed him to have the final say and that is why it got changed into *Sunman*. Warner Bros. loved us but would not accept this

version so the rest is history now. Kenji was a talented gent and he had his own vision whether it was correct for us at Sunsoft or not.

Rob: Might you have any idea why *Batman: Return of the Joker* (*Dynamite Batman* in Japan) had Batman using a gun as his main weapon? That's a question that's been puzzling comic fans for years, since Batman's known for his anti-gun stance. Also—awesome as it is—the game didn't really seem like a *Batman* game. Did it start life as an original title and have the Batman license incorporated through development, or was it intended to be a *Batman* game from the start?



Batman: Return of the Joker (NES, 1991)

David: *Dynamite Batman* started off as a tech demo for the new Sun FME-7 chip, which enabled larger characters made from more and better sprite manipulation. An upgrade so to speak from the then standard *Castlevania* type/sized character which was most common in that era for serious action games. Apparently the dev-team in Nagoya, Konan City more specifically, built a demo with a larger character with some action techniques and some horizontal flying capabilities. The U.S. marketing people of course wanted to tie-in a license and since Sunsoft was already in the Warner Bros. fold, it got finished off as a Neo-Batman game with Dark Knight tendencies.

We were able to convince Warner Bros. to allow Batman to have a weapon in *Dynamite Batman*. Batman was at that time entering a creative phase where he would be older and known as the Dark Knight. It was imagined that Batman would then resort to the use of weapons as criminal elements were getting armed more heavily themselves. It was always a fight when dealing with licenses, something that frustrated both Japan R&D and myself, but that was the direction that we were heading due to the zealous nature of Sunsoft of America's marketing director.

Rob: Did you also work on the original *Batman*, or any other games that were released for the NES around that time, like *Journey To Silius*?

David: *Batman* and *Journey To Silius* were also not my work directly. Those fell under the previous Product Development Director, Jay Moon. He did not contribute to the design, only the localization. I was Mr. Moon's consultant before taking over that position. We both laughed at how Japan R&D changed the character to look like Lucy Ball for the U.S. version. The original *Batman* was quite well done and I was quite happy with that result. The beauty of the Famicom is that it allowed developers to be challenged to extract performance and gameplay due to the limitations of that time.

*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*

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