



Service Games: The Rise and Fall of SEGA: Enhanced Edition

Sam Pettus , David Muñoz , Kevin Williams , Ivan Barroso , David Chen (Editor)

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New Edition! More content, images, and corrected text and facts.

Starting with its humble beginnings in the 1950's and ending with its swan-song, the Dreamcast, in the early 2000's, this is the complete history of Sega as a console maker. Before home computers and video game consoles, before the internet and social networking, and before motion controls and smartphones, there was Sega. Destined to fade into obscurity over time, Sega would help revolutionize and change video games, computers and how we interact with them, and the internet as we know it. Riding the cutting edge of technology at every step, only to rise too close to the sun and plummet, Sega would eventually change the face of entertainment, but it's the story of how it got there that's all the fun. So take a ride, experience history, and enjoy learning about one of the greatest and most influential companies of all time. Complete with system specifications, feature and marketing descriptions, unusual factoids, almost 300 images, and now enhanced Europe specific details, exclusive interviews, and more make this the definitive history of Sega available. Read and learn about the company that holds a special place in every gamer's heart.

Service Games: The Rise and Fall of SEGA: Enhanced Edition Details

Date : Published December 28th 2013 (first published July 12th 2012)

ISBN :

Author : Sam Pettus , David Muñoz , Kevin Williams , Ivan Barroso , David Chen (Editor)

Format : Kindle Edition 482 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Games, Video Games, History, Sports and Games

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From Reader Review Service Games: The Rise and Fall of SEGA: Enhanced Edition for online ebook

Steve says

There's a great story to be told about the 90s video game industry and while this is a better effort than Jeff Ryan's Super Mario: How Nintendo Conquered America, that's a pretty low bar.

It starts quite well and the first half is pretty solid but as it goes on the spelling and grammar mistakes increase, inversely proportional to Sega's success in the market. The effect is therefore of a rabid fanboy, mouth foaming all over the keyboard as he bemoans the dirty tactics of Sony making the Playstation easy to code for or Walmart knocking \$50 off the cost of a Dreamcast. It's repetitive, jumps around chronologically in an annoying way, repetitive and short on genuine insight, being entirely reliant on interviews and coverage from the internet. By the time the author starts including his own forum posts from the turn of the century you'll be willing it to be over soon, and mercifully it is.

Alex Montoya says

En esta edición (traducida, mejorada, corregida y remasterizada) podéis encontrar el libro que ha dado la vuelta al mundo por fin en castellano. Es de esos libros que le tienes ganas años y por fin, gracias a los dioses del metal, tras rogar por una traducción, acaba llegando.

Sí es cierto que el libro tiene algún fallo que ya tenía el original, pero han corregido la mayoría. También hay alguna anarquía en cuanto a la forma y la línea que sigue, con el uso de cursivas y demás, pero eso no importa cuando puedes tener TANTA información recogida. Además tenemos un capítulo exclusivo sobre Sega España que es una maravilla. Yo lo he disfrutado como un erizo.

Ethan Spier says

I enjoyed this book for the most part. It is thoroughly, and very well researched and you definitely get the impression that a lot of time and effort has gone into getting the facts down on the page.

However, there were a number of reasons I have only given this book three stars. The first of these revolves around the fact that I found it a little one-sided and even bias in some areas. The author gives the impression that the U.S. branch of Sega was constantly battling the appalling decisions of Sega Japan. It seems that at every turn, Sega America are cornered into making the decisions that eventually cause the downfall of several systems. This may very well be the overall scenario that panned out, but there are always two sides to every story and this book rarely mentions any other perspective, and I feel it lacks something in the way of balance with regards to this aspect of the story of Sega.

Then there is the writing. Again, for the most part there is little wrong with it and it didn't really detract from my enjoyment of the book. But the author seems to pick and choose from a limited set of stock-phrases - 'the writing was on the wall', instantly comes to mind as he must use this at least twenty times throughout the book (don't hold me to that number). This isn't a big problem, but it does get a little irritating after a while.

My final criticism is probably more of a personal preference, but I felt the author skipped over the Master System too readily. The rest of the book was very thorough, but I felt that this section, which I was interested in learning about, was not quite as in-depth as I would have liked.

If you are a fan of video games and have an interest in learning about the companies involved in the production of the games and systems from the 80's and 90's then I recommend this book to you. Apart from a few criticisms which tainted my enjoyment somewhat, I'm glad I read this book.

Andrew says

An excellent history of Sega and it's trials and tribulations throughout the home console hardware business. Also, an excellent read for those in business and how to steer clear of some decisions and not others.

Joaobispo says

A history of SEGA. I was torn between 3 and 4 stars. In one hand, it was a very enjoyable read, and it shows that it was a work done with a lot of love. In the other hand, the book could have been more polished: typos, sections that repeat information, a bit of amateurish writing...

In any case, I really enjoyed reading about the subject, hence the final score. However, it is hard to recommend the book, unless you are really interested about SEGA and/or videogames.

Andy Parkes says

having read a similar book about the history of Nintendo I was really keen to learn more about the background of Sega. really enjoyed reading this with my only criticism being there were a few points where it felt like it was repeating itself.. might just have been me though as I read it while away on a trip!

Themistocles says

Quite a bit of a disappointment. I was a Kickstarter backer for this book but I'd lie if I said that my anxious waiting was rewarded much, since this book is quite amateurish with lots of flaws.

Sure, it's not as disastrous as the garbage that was called "Atari Inc.: Business is Fun" but it continues a trend of self-published computer history books that don't quite fit the bill.

And it shows from the moment you open the book: put together in Microsoft Word with a totally wrong serif font (apologies the name eludes me) (and with captions in a totally different one), narrow borders and on rather cheap paper. The author has also used some strange quirks like underlining game titles when in italics or using...ellipses...when...listing...multiple...game...names. Weird stuff. Or, lists that are not lists but rather headlined paragraphs (though not throughout, sign of lack of editing).

Doesn't get much better from there as the text is extremely drawn out with lots and lots of boring flourishing, silly questions to the reader that supposedly advance the story, facts (heck, even quotes!) that are repeated, sometimes within the span of a couple of pages and lots of contradictions (for instance: on one page, the American buying public is the victim of an economic slump and therefore demands more for less; two pages on, the same public has money coming out their noses. Sales are good, but then are bad. The market is out of stock, on one page, but on the next units are sitting on the shelves). In most of the cases you get an idea of what the author is trying to say if you already have an idea of what's happening, but that's bad writing.

While lots of stuff is described to death, other details are mentioned en passant and you're left scratching your head as if you were supposed to know what the author is referring to.

Bibliography doesn't exist and sources are laughable. Only "The First Quarter : A 25-year History of Video Games" (a great book btw) is mentioned (again and again, rather suspiciously), but apart from that we're left with a few websites, online FAQs ("easily found on the internet" - seriously?) and quotes from random dudes from online communities and sites. When the author feels the need to quote himself then you know it's probably hopeless (and, hint: referring to yourself in the first person in a history book is always reserved for introductions and such).

The structure of the book is also awkward since, instead of taking things based on the chronology of Sega the author splits the book in machine-based chapters. This **could** have worked, but didn't since he's forced to repeat stuff again and again when pertaining to more than one machines, and gets awkward when he's got to fit in stuff that doesn't apply to a specific machine (for instance, the US videogames violence debacle).

Speaking of structure, Kaoru in his review points out correctly that the book is very US-centric to the point of ignoring Europe altogether throughout the book and just tacking in an extra chapter at the end to describe that market, inevitably leading to even more repetition. If that's not lazy, I don't know what is.

Ok, so what about the essence of the book - knowledge? I don't consider myself to be a Sega expert. I've got a SMD in my living room because my wife had one as a teenager and I love my DC to bits, but as far as SEGA-specific knowledge goes I only know what I've read in Retro Gamer, other general retro-gaming books or in random online articles. However, I don't feel I learned that much from the book after all, at least nothing significant. And what I missed most is the absence of the story of hardware development (but of course this would require real research).

All in all, it seems to me like the author just went online, read whatever he could find and then assembled the book. This, however, as anyone who has done online research knows, is not an easy task. Turning hundreds or thousands of tidbits/clippings into something coherent and distilling the essence of the quagmire is quite hard and in this the book fails.

The book should have been much tighter (and at least 100 pages shorter), much tidier, much deeper, and supervised by a professional editor. I'd like my money back, please...

PS "The word 'genesis' in **Hebrew** also means 'in the beginning' "... SERIOUSLY?

Kaoru says

Unfortunately not a particularly good book, largely thanks to pretty poor editing. And to be frank, one has to

wonder if it really has ever been seen by an editor's eyes, because the text is so repetitive and contradictory. Points and facts are established and re-established over and over again, the very same quotes appear more than once, and some points raised aren't exactly in line with things mentioned later. For instance, at first 1992 is painted as the beginning of a "golden age" for SEGA, a few pages later it gets called out as the "beginning of the end". And while I *kind of get* what the author is trying to say here (Meaning: SEGA outreaching itself too quickly and making too many mistakes with long-term effects very early on), it isn't fleshed out very well, if at all. And then there's the lack of footnotes, which makes you question the verifiability of numbers when it comes to sales and statistics - especially since the book is so hard to trust already.

Furthermore it's written from a very American perspective, so you might read the name "Genesis" far more often than "Mega Drive". That alone may not be a problem, the fixation on that particular market however is. In a casual aside you suddenly learn that the Sonic games never were particularly popular in Japan, and all you can do is wonder "Oh? I didn't know? But why is that? *Care to elaborate?*" without ever getting an explanation. Even worse fares Europe – or least you think so for the first 80% or so of the book. That part of the story gets excluded nearly completely, just to get tacked on with a chapter of its own, in which the whole story of SEGA gets told *again*, sometimes mentioning and establishing the same facts and events we already know. So why not put all the European stuff into the main text in the first place? What the hell was the point? (By the way, this very section includes one of the book's biggest faux-pas. First it's said that „by the mid-90s the Mega Drive had gained a respectable customer base“. Then, two sentences later, we get told that „in 1996 SEGA finally retired it“ due to low sales. So which one is it, book???)

It's not an awful book, however. It's not *unreadable*, and if anything it's good to give you an overview of SEGA's history and how it came to be that the company left the console business for good at the beginning of the century. It just has to be met with a bit of caution. Read it when you're interested... or wait for a better one to arrive. (Which will surely come sooner or later anyway.)

I.D. says

To paraphrase Jeff Goldblum in Jurassic Park; just because someone can do something, doesn't mean they should. This is a case of someone with their heart in the right place being totally unqualified for the job. This may be the worst edited book I've ever seen with rampant repetition, typos, poorly constructed sentences, and conflicting information. It's almost as if online articles were just dumped onto paper. While there is some valid research and interesting info, it's buried inside a totally amateurish presentation and in some cases embarrassingly bad final product. I would say that Sega deserves better, but maybe a company with so many failures is just getting what it sowed. Love the games, wish someone competent tackled the history.

Johnny says

This little jewel is more complete than a lot of books on video game history which have received more attention. That is not my usual bias with regard to books dealing with console game history. With regard to the history of SEGA, *Service Games: The Rise and Fall of SEGA* (available on Kindle) is far better than my own co-authored effort (*High Score: An Illustrated History of Electronic Games*) and similar generalist efforts. I found it more useful than *Console Wars*, even when they overlap.

I was delighted to have my prejudice confirmed that each generation of Japanese console has been sabotaged by an arrogance within the management of the previous top-dog. Although, as with *Console Wars*, it seemed like the narrative was written according to the memory of Tom Kalinske more than anyone else, the quotations and statistics quoted by Pettus seem more than sufficient to justify my...er...prejudice. I was rather surprised to see that the author was unfamiliar with the *Milia* Festival on Interactivity (held in Cannes near the first of the year around the turn of the millennium), calling it the Milla trade show (when it was really more of a conference or symposium on interactive software (multimedia) during the two years where I served on the *Milia d' Or* jury for games or as a speaker). Nevertheless, I rather enjoyed the quotations from the gaming press where alleged journalists were completely taken in by press conferences and “dog and pony shows” (like *Electronic Gaming Monthly*’s Crispin Boyer as quoted on the SegaNet – not to be confused with the Sega Network on cable television).

The best part of this history of Sega is that it clearly demonstrates how losing developer support cost hardware companies the “war” (and still does!). Over and over, observers have noticed how arrogantly ignoring one’s developers creates havoc in the hardware’s future. Why did Nintendo beat out a superior PC Engine launch? “...two reasons for NEC’s blunder. First, Nintendo had the best of the Japanese third-party software community happily signed up to its restrictive yet lucrative development contracts. Second, NEC’s own stable of programmers were not yet up to speed on the full capabilities of their own system.” (p. 46) Indeed, knowing how important EA was to the fast Genesis launch in the U.S., it was surprising that the company failed to grant the following demand from Electronic Arts, as Bernie Stolar noted: “Larry came to me and said, 'Bernie, we'll do Dreamcast games, but we want sports exclusivity.'” (p. 315) Stolar said, “No!” One wonders if that was a critical miss. Gems such as this observation on the 2001 Tokyo Game Show simply have to stand out: “Sega may have had the public ear at the Tokyo Game Show, but Sony had the developers' support.” (p. 342)

I also had never really thought about the depiction of Sonic before. Sonic was simply a ubiquitous symbol of SEGA during the days I was covering the industry and I never asked the obvious question as to why coloration and appearance was so different from a real hedgehog. Like the rest of the universe, I surrendered my disbelief and didn’t realize: “He would be blue because that was the color of Sega’s corporate logo. And as a round ball did not offer much visual impact, and quills could not be easily depicted on screen, he was given spiked hair. As he would be a fast character – and hedgehogs are not known for speed – he was given a pair of running shoes.” (pp. 60-61)

I chuckled, remembering how Nintendo double-crossed Sony by contracting them to develop a “Super Disc” drive for the SNES (to have been called SNES PlayStation) and shifted gears to Philips in order to have full control over its use. The war of words cited here should cover the gamut from Nintendo arrogance to Sony’s original naiveté: ““Nintendo believes in a standard – our standard,” Yamauchi later said of the affair. Sony saw it differently. “They stabbed us in the back,” Olafsson told one of his confidants.” (p. 182). The double-cross proved to be a near-fatal flaw as Sony took their PlayStation to great heights, well over the sales of Sega or Nintendo.

And I had forgotten that pornography helped 3DO survive a little longer than it might have, otherwise: “...a proliferation of Asian adult-themed software would help boost Far East 3DO sales toward respectable levels.” (p. 185)

But I hadn’t forgotten one of the big reasons for the failure of Sega at a time when they should have been killing the market with both legacy software for the Genesis and new releases for the Saturn. “The Japanese are making the decisions for the U.S. market,” Kalinske later grumbled, “and they do not know what they are doing.” (p. 192) In one sense, Kalinske’s alibi (quoted in other books, as well) is accurate, but even Kalinske

wasn't doing a good job of listening to U.S. developers at the time. Most developers believed that "working around Saturn's architecture" necessitated "a 25% drop in overall system efficiency due to shared resources, mitigating the benefits parallel processing was supposed bring." (p. 193) The authors cite both Yu Suzuki of Sega and Peter Molyneux (then, of Bullfrog) as stating that the only way to get comparable performance between the Sega Saturn and the Playstation was to code in pure assembler (p. 193).

And, as for the Dreamcast, "Surreal's Alan Patmore spoke for all in an interview with NextGen when he said, '...Dreamcast will stick around until PlayStation 2 really makes its mark. I think it'll be the interim system. It's pretty hot right now.'" (p. 341) Once again, we return to the theme that a platform cannot succeed without developer support.

The Kindle version of the book that I have has an expanded section with factoids toward the end. My very favorite is this one: "...the Dreamcast is home to the most expensive-to-produce games made to date. Shenmue and Shenmue 2 cost more than \$70 million at the time; Sega would have needed to sell two copies of each game for each Dreamcast sold, just to break even." (p. 403)

For my purposes, *Service Games: The Rise and Fall of Sega*, is superior to most books on the subject because it has a sense of balance, not championing one system over another and not using any one source to the detriment of the others.

Jason says

The content is interesting, but it's not put together well. The text is rambling and goes off on tangents, and it tends to repeat itself often.

Its organization was confusing (which admittedly wasn't helped by Sega's product line). It covered the rise & fall of the genesis, and then the full story Sega CD, and then the 32x, and then the Sega Saturn.

The problem is these devices have overlap in their lifetimes. In the story of Sega CD the first mention of the 32x was how Sega CD affected the 32x sales. "Wait, what? When was it released? When & why was it developed?" I think a straight chronological story, covering all products at once, would've been much more readable.

Tim Lapetino says

Very enlightening history of Sega, spanning its early days all the way into the swan song of the Dreamcast. I'm no Sega expert, but the author doesn't help his credibility when much of the tone seems to take that of a scolding parent, at times seemingly dressing down Sega and its executives for their handling of the business or decisions. I was also slightly annoyed that he found it necessary to bash Atari in any way that was even remotely related to. A point on classic consoles.

I appreciate the author's desire to be thorough and exhaustive, but it's a very long read that could have been tightened and condensed by a good editor. Helpful for someone new to Sega's history (like me) but seems far

too full of speculation and opinion to serve as the gospel of Sega. Perhaps another book will do that.

Miguel Lozano says

Good book with a lot of interesting facts, but a little repetitive and too long for what it is. Jumps back and forth in time, making it confusing and redundant. Would have benefited from a lot more editing. The afterword says it's a book version of a website or something like that and it shows. It's like 35% away to be a book in it's own. Recommended for hardcore Sega fans and people really interested in retrogaming.

Vaettur says

Great book, which gave me a lot of new information and insights, even after reading multiple videogame books that cover much of Sega's vibrant history.

There are in my opinion 2 flaws though;

1. The writing style - Somehow, the entire book feels like I'm reading a giant post on a forum. It's hard to explain, something about the use of words and the structure of sentences. It's also very repetitive at times.
2. The book focuses too much on the fall, and too less on the rise of Sega. Don't misunderstand me, of course the Megadrive/Genesis - it's flagship - is widely covered, but it could definitely be more in my opinion. More, the Dreamcast (and the drama around it) almost covered the complete latter half of the book, going into every detail. As for the Megadrive, the creation of Sonic, it's aggressive marketing, as well as some of the drama (Night Trap, MK etc.) is only vaguely mentioned, not into detail at all. Less Dreamcast/Saturn, more MegaDrive/Genesis!

That said, I did enjoy this book. If you can live with it's flaws, I definitely recommend it!

Alex Montoya says

He leído la versión mejorada de GamePress y me ha parecido increíble. Un maravilla de datos e Historia pura del Videojuego, pese a que conserva algún que otro fallette del original sin importancia. Versión corregida (en su mayoría), mejorada, remasterizada y aumentada. ¿Sabes el típico libro que siempre dices "ojalá salga en castellano"? Pues este es uno. Indispensable.
