

An excerpt from "How I Lost and Found My *Super Mario Bros. 2*" by Shmup Junkie

I should've known better than to bring my brand new copy with me to school, but I couldn't help myself. Being a school week, I wouldn't get to play it until the weekend. All I could do was ogle the box art and manual in the meantime. And it turned out we were leaving town to Vegas on Friday so I wouldn't even be able to play it! Ugh, what a tease. Patience was never one of my virtues. So I brought it to school to share my excitement with friends, who of course were also eager to play it at my place once I was back.

One of those friends—actually, more of an acquaintance, so we'll call him 'Victor' to protect his identity and save him the embarrassment in the off chance he ever reads this—was so excited to play it that he just couldn't wait. With all of us sitting around the cafeteria table at recess and discussing what we were looking forward to about the game, Victor suddenly made a stunning proposition.

'Can I borrow it for the weekend?' he asked. 'You won't be able to play it this weekend anyway while you're gone.' The laughter couldn't have escaped my mouth fast enough. It was almost like a natural response to the absurdity of the request. He wanted to borrow a brand new game that I'd been dying to play and haven't even touched yet myself? A game I'd been coveting? One whose box I'd been clinging to like an only child since it released, counting the minutes until I could finally play? Lend it out? I don't think so. Even the rest of our friends sitting at the table found it absurd. How could you ask someone to borrow a game they just got and hadn't even played themselves yet. The nerve!

But Victor remained undeterred. He wanted to play it so badly he could cry. And his family couldn't afford to buy a copy at the time. He begged. He pleaded. To the point of annoyance. He tried again during the lunch break and promised he'd give it right back Monday morning. *Maybe I shouldn't have brought this coveted gaming gem to school with me*, I thought. I don't know if it was the relentlessness, my good nature, or finally just taking pity on him, but after an entire lunch break of nagging, I foolishly started to come around and figured I'd maybe let him use it while I was gone anyway. I should've trusted my gut. It felt like a bad idea from the start. Yet despite my better judgment, I finally acquiesced by the end of the school day and agreed. But on one condition: that he guard it with his life. Because if something happened to it, I would literally kill him. Take it straight home after school. It never leaves your backpack. Play it only at home and don't take it over other people's houses. Of course, Victor was ecstatic and thanked me profusely. He promised to be super careful and not take it anywhere. So despite my better judgment, I watched my coveted *Super Mario Bros. 2* leave with someone else that day. A pang of anxiety filled my soul.

Written by Shmup Junkie. This excerpt from the book *Digital Archaeology: Retrogaming Recollections* is © 2024 SCAR Productions. Please do not distribute without the author's permission. Direct all inquiries to Rob Strangman at [gradiusone \[at\] yahoo \[dot\] com](mailto:gradiusone[at]yahoo[dot]com).