

#10

The Monthly Silly

Sonic Racing: Cross Worlds

My blue hyperfixation rat has a new game

how you look
if you disagree
with me

valiant warrior



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Silly Spotlight 1

Jumping Flash!

Jumping Flash is a first-person 3D platformer released in 1995 for the PlayStation, and is often cited as one of the first attempts at a proper 3D game. How does it hold up today, though? Well, it turns out... surprisingly well!

In Jumping Flash, you play as Robbit, a robot rabbit who needs to save his world from being destroyed by the evil Baron Aloha. To do this, you have to explore through a variety of open-ended 3D levels, collect all the Jet Pods, and then make your way to the exit, platforming around various obstacles and shooting down enemies as you go. Now, the idea of a 3D platformer in a first-person perspective featuring tank controls, everyone's favourite thing, might sound horrible, but Jumping Flash actually manages to make it work somehow.



This is mainly done through the game's emphasis on verticality. The game gives you a double jump, and when you use it, the camera points directly downwards, allowing you to see what's beneath you as well as providing a conveniently placed shadow that shows you where you'll land. Taking advantage of this, the best of Jumping Flash's 11 main stages are very vertical, often just as tall as they are wide, which works well with the controls and first-person angle. There are a few which aren't great, two in particular taking place in mazes of tunnels that feel less like a 3D platformer and more like a slower, less fun version of Doom or Wolfenstein 3D, but those at least have an interesting enough atmosphere to make up for the strange design choices.

Probably the game's only real problem from a gameplay perspective is that it can be a little too easy at times. The enemies are never a real threat, generally being very easy to shoot down or jump on, and in the rare event you start to struggle a little bit, the game gives you several single-use items that can all be used to destroy everything around you easily. They're really satisfying to use, though, so I don't really care.





The difficulty is fine, though, since Jumping Flash is less about tricky platforming or tense combat than it is about exploration. Most of the game's levels (so, all the best ones) are designed to be open-ended, the player having to thoroughly search through them to find all the Jet Pods, and some of their hiding places can be surprisingly tricky at times. It's more about searching through every nook and cranny of each level to find all the Jet Pods than anything else, and the floaty physics combined with the precision of the downward view after a double jump both make this an inherently enjoyable process.

From looking at the images I've included, one thing you've probably noticed about this game by now is that it's quite strange. Probably due to it being made when 3D technology for games was so recent, Jumping Flash has this consistently bizarre, surreal feeling to it, made up of environments that vaguely feel like places but also consist largely of random objects and strange creatures scattered about at random. It's very odd, but I personally really like it, and think it gives the game a lot of character compared to others like it. The music is also very nice! It's nothing exceptional, but I'm quite fond, and it



makes the game a much more enjoyable experience.



Overall, I really like Jumping Flash. It's a bit short, featuring six worlds with two regular stages and one boss fight each (world six opts for one stage and two bosses instead), but it's still great fun, and for what it is, it's extremely impressive. It came out a full year before Super Mario 64 and Crash Bandicoot, both games which are often thought of as having properly "defined" the 3D platformer genre and established the standard going

forwards, and in some ways, it shows. The first-person perspective and the way the camera points down after a double jump are both really interesting design choices that help give the game a unique identity even to this day, but it does feel kind of bizarre to get used to, and I can't pretend it's not annoying to have to spend a good two or three seconds rotating around to deal with an enemy that happens to be behind you, as rare of a situation as that is. Despite that, though, I still think Jumping Flash is a great time, and if you think it seems fun, I'd recommend you play it. Personally, whenever I've seen this game discussed online, it's as a strange, "good-for-the-time" curiosity to point at and go "wow, aren't we so much better than this now", but I think it's worth far more than that.

Final Score	
Gameplay - 7	6
Story - 5	
Look/Sound - 7	

Silly Spotlight 2

T'ai Fu

Wrath of the Tiger

T'ai Fu: Wrath of the Tiger, released in 1999 for the PS1, is a 3D action game that goes in my small but ever-growing list of “early hack-and-slashes that were better than the original Devil May Cry”. Right now it’s just this and Chaos Legion, but I’m always looking to expand it.

Anyway, I’m getting ahead of myself. In T'ai Fu, you play as... T'ai Fu, the last remaining member of the Tiger Clan who’s been training his kung fu skills with the old Panda Master, in a world that embodies that distinct “what every westerner thought China was like in the 80s and 90s” aesthetic which we’ll refer to as Hyper-China for now. Anyway, our furry kung-fu warrior has been training in peace for some time, until the sanctuary is attacked by the Dragon Lord and his evil army of snake-men. The Panda Master is killed in the attack, and T'ai embarks on a quest of revenge across the land of Hyper-China!



It's a simple plot setup, but it works well enough. Of course, with T'ai still having been in training before his master was killed, he's hardly an expert yet, so he'll need to learn of the various kung-fu styles from the various clans he meets across his journey. This is somehow the game's best and worst aspect at the same time. Your moveset starts out very basic, with just a regular attack and a somewhat janky throw, but over the game's approximately 6-8 hour journey, you'll

unlock several more moves to add to your arsenal, and by the end, you end up with far more options than I ever expected going in, from ranged Chi blasts, to a fast dash that can lead into its own alternate attack type, to an immensely satisfying jumping roll attack that cancels into itself and offers a perfect balance of damage and mobility. It's a great moveset, which by the end of the game, gives you endless ways to approach any situation and style on your enemies.



Put simply, the moveset in this game is great, I love it! But it also takes a bit too long to get there. Like I said, at the start of the game, you don't really have a lot, and the various new move unlocks are spread evenly across the game, meaning you don't unlock the last addition to your moveset until right before the last level, and the one before that isn't unlocked until you're around 80% of the way through.

Given the story context surrounding that last move being unlocked (no spoilers), I can accept it being saved until you're near the end, but I really think the starting moveset should have included the first two unlockable moves (the dash and the screen-clearing blast that empties your Chi gauge), and the rest of the unlocks aside from the last should have been shifted around so they'd come earlier. That said, the game is quite short anyway, so it's not nearly a significant enough issue to warrant not recommending it over.

Gameplay aside, the presentation is also very nice. For such a short game, there's an impressive variety of different locations, and they all look amazing; of the game's 20 levels, I don't think there's a single one I don't love the look of. The Hyper-Chinese setting might feel a bit silly, with its population seemingly consisting exclusively of various animal-themed kung-fu clans, but it's obvious a lot of thought and care went into the visual design of each and every area, the treetop village of the Monkey Clan being a particular favourite of mine.



Overall, T'ai Fu: Wrath of the Tiger is a great game, not to mention a very interesting one. It came out right at the mid-point of action games' transition from the simplistic side-scrolling beat-em-ups that populated arcades of the 90s and the library of the 16-bit consoles, to the more complex, "stylish" combat of the PS2 era. Devil May Cry may have set the standard for those sorts of games going forwards, but I think the transition over to

bigger, more interesting movesets and emphasis on long combo strings was largely inevitable, and I see T'ai Fu as proof of this. It's an excellent game, and as long as you're willing to get through the early portions where the moveset isn't quite as interesting, I have no doubt anyone who likes this sort of thing will love it.

Final Score	
Gameplay - 9	8
Story - 6	
Look/Sound - 8	

Kill Your Friends!

SONIC™ RACING CROSSWORLDS

Sonic Racing: CrossWorlds is a racing game released in September of this year, and along with last year's Shadow Generations, finally gives me some hope that this series might actually be good again.

I'm not quite sure where to start with this one, though. Usually I like to start by describing the basic gameplay, but it's a kart racer, you probably have some idea of how it plays already. But, it does do quite a lot differently (and I'd say, better) than a lot of its competition, so let's talk about that! For

one, the gadget system. Before you jump into a race, you can put together a "deck" of different gadgets, which each grant some sort of bonus effect. You have six slots, but some take up multiple, so you have to choose carefully. I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that this system single-handedly makes this one of the best kart racers out there.



It sounds simple enough, but the choice of which gadgets you go with, combined with the character and vehicle you choose, can drastically alter your playstyle, and choosing the right combination is key. Let's say you want a high-risk, high-reward playstyle geared exclusively towards making you as fast as possible, for example; in that case, you could choose the

Ultimate Charge gadget, which adds an extra 4th tier of speed boost to your drift, greatly increasing your potential top speed, and combine that with the Technical Drift and Quick Charge LV2/LV3 gadgets, allowing you to reach that 4th tier faster. But, that has its problems! Since you're neglecting power for speed, you'll get knocked around easily, and if an item hits you, your speed will take a severe hit. So, you could pick a character with a high Power stat, and instead of all that, go for the Collision Boost gadget to get a speed boost from knocking other players about, Spin Drift so they get knocked further off course, and Boost Tuners to increase your Boost stat, increasing the benefit from Collision Boost's effect.

Gadget customization possibilities in this game really are endless (that second one being my favourite), and talking about the mechanic also leads into the wonderful amount of fun unlockable little thingies the game has to offer.

The game doesn't lock much crucial stuff behind needing to be unlocked, you start the game with most of the tracks and all the characters (aside from Super Sonic but he doesn't count), but beyond that, you're basically always unlocking something. Nearly everything you do grants Donpa Tickets, which can

be spent on customizing the look of your vehicle and simping for your favourite characters' OnlyFans, and the main way you unlock new gadgets is just by doing a lot of races. As a result, the game is able to easily stay feeling fresh and new, as well as always giving you a reason to come back, which is vital for a genre like this.

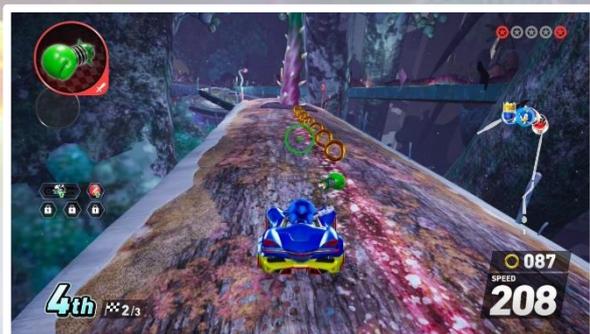
The game also features strange mini-tracks called "CrossWorlds", using a random one for the second lap of each race. Most are quite good! They're not as consistent as the regular tracks, but I'm still quite fond. Although, once you finish every Grand Prix, you

"unlock" the ability for the game to use regular tracks for these lap 2 interruptions instead of CrossWorlds, which since the CrossWorld tracks can't be selected by themselves outside time trials, ends up feeling more like a downgrade than anything, and forms one of only two

real issues I have with the game. The other being the crossover DLCs! I hate these.

For "some reason" (money), the game features various paid DLC packs for characters from other popular franchises, like... Minecraft, Spongebob, and the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. I hate this. I despise

guest characters like these in games, full stop, they only serve to dilute a game's unique, distinct aesthetic identity in exchange for a cheap "woah that's the guy from popular thing", I'm sick of it. "Oh dududuh just don't buy the DLCs then-" goddamn!!! Shut the fuck up!!! Even if I don't, they're still on the character select screen behind a big padlock symbol, and if I play online, I still have a chance of running into them there. The crossovers anger me, far more than they probably should, and I utterly despise seeing them here. These aside, the presentation in this game is very nice. The tracks are nearly all excellent to look at, and for the first time in 8 years, we finally have a new Sonic game with a good OST! Overall, Sonic Racing: CrossWorlds is a surprisingly amazing game; gadget customization is endless fun, the core racing gameplay has an excellent sense of speed to it, and overall, this one might just solo the entire Mario Kart series for me.



Final Score	
Gameplay - 10	8
Story - 5	
Look/Sound - 8	

Easy Emulation

Riviera

The Promised Land

Riviera: The Promised Land is a turn-based RPG released for the Gameboy Advance in 2004. Ok, it was originally a WonderSwan Colour game, and has since been ported to various other systems, but the GBA version's the one I played, so it's the one I'm talking about.

Immediately, the first thing that jumps out at you about this game is its presentation. Animations on big attacks are great, your characters all get really nice hand-drawn art portraits, and several important story moments are accompanied by detailed art pieces. Hell, even the menus and HUD elements have a really strong sense of style to them, far more than any other GBA game I've played. It might seem small, but it forms a strong part of this game's appeal – aside from maybe Fire Emblem, I doubt there's another GBA game that's this much fun just to watch and look at.



Shiny graphics are useless if your game's no fun to play, though; fortunately, Riviera excels in this aspect as well. The game has an odd combat system, being entirely based around items; you can have up to 20 items on you at a time, each with a set number of limited uses, and can bring up to 4 of those into each battle. Each item does something different when used by each character; for example, Ein, Fia and Cierra are skilled at using rapiers, so they'll use a quick multi-hitting attack if they use the Rapier item, but Lina and Serene don't know how to use them well, so they'll just chuck one at the enemy.

There's also an Overdrive gauge that fills up as you battle. Each weapon has character-specific Over Skills tied to it, each one costing either 1, 2 or 3 bars of the TP gauge. I like these! All of them, especially the higher-level ones, are excellently animated, and are capable of dealing serious damage to the enemy party in ways that never become any less satisfying. The TP gauge and Over Skills, combined with the various elemental affinities of each weapon and the fact you can only bring four total items in, adds a degree of strategy to this game that never fails to keep enemy encounters feeling fresh and unique, even for a more than 20-hour game.



It's not all perfect, though. Characters don't have their Over Skills for each of the weapons you'll find unlocked from the start; to unlock them, you need to use the corresponding weapon until its Mastery Gauge fills up. This is... not a great system. For one, it's just annoying; it's fine at first, but the game uses a set few specific weapon types (swords, scythes, spears, etc), with each subsequent weapon in each type functioning as a strict upgrade to the previous, so every time it decides to introduce a new "rank" of weapon for each type, you're stuck grinding it up again. This also poses a problem; encounters happen at set points, and enemies die permanently once you're done with them, so in theory, you can't re-fight them to grind weapon mastery.

The solution? Practice Mode! Here, you can fight a randomly selected, pitifully easy group of enemies to fight, with infinitely reusable items, in order to master certain weapons. Honestly, I hate this mode, it's boring and stupid and you should really just get the Mastery Gauge up in actual battles, with all the combat disadvantages that would imply. This game's not that hard, you'll be fine. Anyway, the story!



The story is... well, it's alright. It's a fairly standard "go defeat the Bad Guys doing Bad Stuff" for the most part, being much less focused on intricate plot details than it is on its characters. Along the way, you'll get into various silly little mishaps with your party, and the characters, although a bit basic, are all really likeable. The actual plot might not be anything all that special, but it's made up for by the cast

of characters accompanying you for your journey, and the various ways they all bounce off each other. It's a fun, lighthearted time; nothing groundbreaking, but still enjoyable.

Overall, I really like this one. Aesthetically it's a joy to look at, easily one of the best-looking games on the system, but that aside, the combat is excellent. The limited item uses and only being able to bring 4 into battle, combined with the elemental weakness system that applies to both you and your enemies, keeps it from ever getting at all stale, and forces you to really think about each encounter, even the smaller ones.

Admittedly though, it does sometimes come across as a game that likes its various smaller animations a little too much, so make sure to play it on an emulator with easy access to a fast-forward button. As long as you do that, though, it's a great game, with a fun story and characters, great gameplay and excellent presentation.

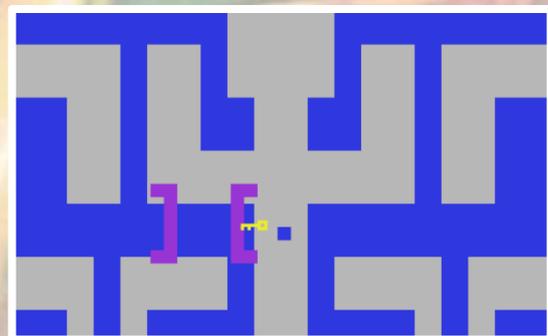
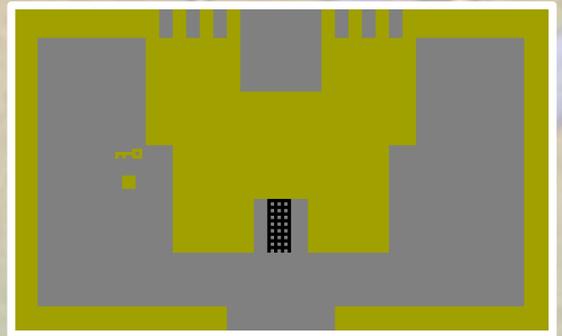
Final Score	
Gameplay - 8	8
Story - 7	
Look/Sound - 10	

The Ancient Ones

ADVENTURE

Adventure is a game released in 1980 for the Atari 2600, and possibly one of the most fun games on the system. Ok, I haven't played that many, but I like it a lot more than what I have.

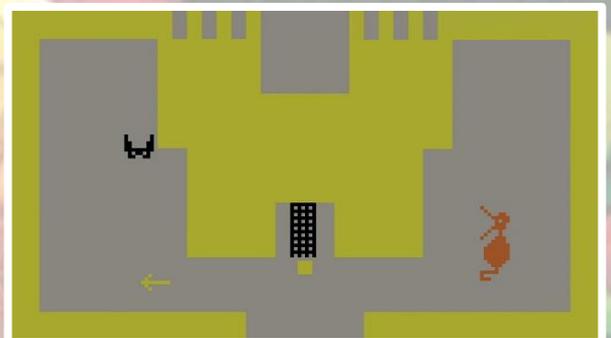
Being one of the first proper attempts at an open-ended gameplay structure, you play as a little square thingy, and need to find the Chalice hidden somewhere in the world and return it to the Golden Castle, all while evading the dragons lurking about. Controls are simple, all you really do is move about with the joystick; you can pick up items by walking into them, at which point they'll stick to your little square man and follow you around, and you can press the button to put them down. All items are used by making them touch whatever they're programmed to interact with – touch the Dragon with the Sword to kill it, touch the castle door with the key of the corresponding colour to open it, that sort of thing.



It's a very rudimentary game, but I actually think that works in its favour, an idea most clearly demonstrated by my favourite item in the game, the Bridge. Rendered as a set of two purple square bracket thingies (you get used to it, I promise), the Bridge can be placed over any sort of wall to allow you to move through it. This works

anywhere in the game. It might sound a bit silly, but there's this janky charm to the idea of "the item that lets you ignore collision" that I absolutely love, it's the sort of thing that could only work on a system like the 2600.

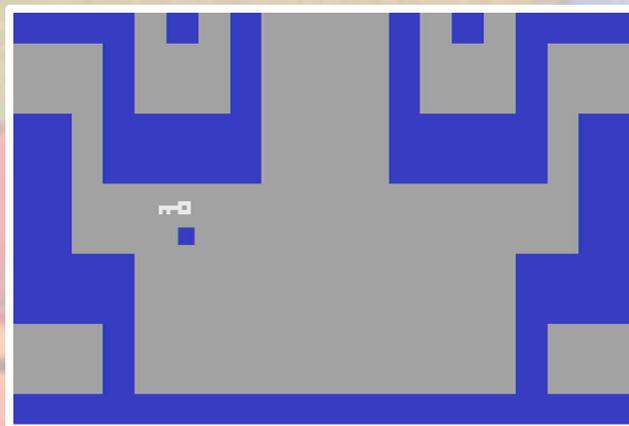
Speaking of the items, I need to talk about that fuckass bat my beloved. The bat is a funny little creature that moves around on the map, completely independent of anything you do, and rearranges items' positions at random, sometimes happening to run into you along its way. That's it. It is not here to help you or to hurt you, it is a pure agent of chaos, and I love it. One moment it's taking away the dragon chasing you and replacing it with a magnet to help you attract a nearby key, and the next it's stealing your chalice right as you were about to beat the game and replacing it with a useless key that unlocks an area you've already been to.





The bat's presence alone turns the game from a straightforward process of finding various different keys for different doors and trying not to get eaten by dragons along the way into a much more chaotic, frustrating, and ultimately much funnier and more memorable experience. This infuriating little creature is such genius design, I absolutely love it.

By now, I've basically summarized the game in its entirety. It's a fairly simple one, you run about trying to navigate the labyrinth-like maze the game throws you into, needing to find keys to unlock doors and avoid the dragons lurking around every corner, all while dealing with that silly little bat and its silly little machinations, but it was ahead of its time in quite a lot of ways.



Open-ended gameplay aside (I'm hesitant to call it "open world", it really plays more like a singular Zelda dungeon than anything), it also has three distinct levels; the first being a baby beginner mode meant as an introduction to the game, the second being the actual game, and the third being a built-in randomizer mode, a strange niche feature that's these days only ever included by a handful of indie games. More broadly, it represented a shift away from the high score-driven focus of most games of its time towards having a concrete goal and being something you could actually "finish".



Oh, I almost forgot! I was nearly done writing this review when I remembered this game also features the first ever example of an easter egg in a video game, which is ironic given that this seems to be one of the few things anyone remembers about it. Apparently, the guy who made this game was annoyed about not being credited for his work by Atari, so he added a secret

little thingy where, if you find the Grey Dot that blends perfectly into the background and bring it to a certain area, you'll find a message that says "created by Warren Robinett".

Anyway, fun easter egg aside, Adventure is a surprisingly fun game, even to this day. It's challenging, but never feels absurd or unfair, and the built-in Level 3 randomizer makes it a far more replayable game than it might appear at first glance, with no two playthroughs ever quite feeling the same. I'd say it's still well worth playing, both as a fun curiosity about gaming history and just as an actual game that you can play and have fun with.

Final Score	
Gameplay - 7	7
Innovation - 10	
Look/Sound - 5	

The Yap Trap

Nintendo Fans & Turn-Based RPGs

I've noticed a certain two patterns lately with Nintendo fans that annoy me greatly, so I need to rant about it. Despite my annoyance, though, if you're someone who does this, I don't hold it against you – well, not entirely, first type of person is alright. Second I have no patience for.

So, turn-based RPGs! I love them, some people don't, some think they're "outdated design" (kill), but Nintendo fans in particular seem to have some... special opinions on them. I have, on (if I remember correctly) four separate occasions, tried to recommend one of these games to someone, only for them to say they "don't like turn-based combat". Fine, I think to myself, it's not for everyone, but when I ask what games in the genre they've played, they give one of two answers. The first is that they've played Earthbound, and... nothing else. Right, that explains it.



If this is you, I have something important you need to hear. Earthbound is not a good game. Now, this isn't to say it has no redeeming qualities, I can absolutely understand why so many people love it, but its combat is horrifically basic and one-note, forces you to go through it with just one character in your party for an inordinate amount of time before giving you a single other party member, and requires an insufferable amount of grinding to get anywhere. The only reason I haven't written a review of it for Shame Corner by

now is because that would require me to replay it to refresh my memory, it's not good by any stretch of the imagination. If you like it, that's fine, but clearly if you're saying you "don't like turn-based combat" after playing it you didn't enjoy your time with it, so I have to say that the genre has other far better and more enjoyable offerings than this.

Earthbound is genuinely one of the worst implementations of turn-based combat I have ever come across in a video game, and I find it a mix of sad and deeply annoying when people play it and proceed to base their opinion of the entire genre on their experience with it. It's not unreasonable on their part, either; other Nintendo fans will bend over backwards trying to tell you it's some sort of masterpiece, so when you're surrounded by enough of that sort of thing, it's easy to assume that "well, if I didn't enjoy one of the best turn-based RPGs out there, then maybe the rest of the genre just isn't for me". No, Earthbound is just bad.



There are countless turn-based RPGs out there with fun and engaging combat that don't have any of the same problems as Earthbound (Riviera from earlier in this issue, the Etrian Odyssey series, Live A Live, Bravely Default and any of the Shin Megami Tensei games from Nocturne onwards just to name a few), but ultimately, I don't entirely blame people for this perception. Like I said, lots of people online love to ignore Earthbound's flaws for reasons I'm not entirely sure of, so if you end up having lots of problems

with it that you've never seen anyone else talking about, it's logical to assume those are issues with the whole genre. That said, this next sort of person is entirely inexcusable.

Earthbound aside, Nintendo also made the Paper Mario and Mario & Luigi series, both significantly better RPGs I'm actually quite fond of. These feature action command systems, where your attacks include real-time button prompts that let you deal significantly more damage if timed correctly. Additionally, when enemies attack, you need to stay alert and react in real time to defend your team and minimize damage. These systems are fine, I have no issue with them, but I've heard some people say things like "I'm not inherently against turn-based RPGs, but I need them to have some kind of action command system like in Paper Mario to enjoy them".



If that's how you think, this is how I see you. Logically, there's no reason why this is an "incorrect opinion", but I don't care, it comes across as childish and stupid and like you never developed mentally past the age of 12. There's nothing wrong with liking Nintendo or any other games once you're past a certain age, hell, I gave the new Sonic racing game an 8/10 earlier in this issue, but eventually, you really need to grow up and broaden your horizons a little bit. I don't care if it's petty or elitist, I'm right and you're wrong.