



The Zelda Test Cartridge

Article by **Otto Hanson**

Out of all the Authorized Service Center items that have surfaced, it can easily be argued that none have been more controversial and desirable than the Legend of Zelda test cartridge. Because of all the hype and mystique surrounding its existence, it has become one of, if not the most, expensive pieces of test equipment one can purchase in today's market. Although infrequently up for auction on eBay, they command a strong price if properly listed...one Zelda test cart openly auctioned on eBay sold for just over \$600 only a few months back. I have done a large amount of research into how these sought-after cartridges found their way into the hands of individual collectors, and while a good number have simply purchased them off of eBay, some of the stories are quite interesting indeed.



In August 2005, a collector that went by the username 'Alm0stFinished' wound up finding three of these Zelda cartridges at a flea market for \$10 each. He almost missed out on this great find because he decided to leave them and go

home to check online to see if he could find any information on them. His searches came up dry, but he went back and purchased them anyhow. The labels on all three cartridges weren't in the greatest condition; suffering from what looked to be some sort of heat damage. At this point in time, the only forum he was a member of was gametz, so he posted his amazing discovery there. Unfortunately, no one there knew what they were...a few other users came to the consensus that these three games must be pirated versions and thus were maybe worth the \$10 he had paid for each of them. Thankfully, a collector that went by the alias of pa_nes_ian (who has since moved on from NES collecting) happened to see the post and told him what they really were.

Pa-nes-ian purchased one of the copies, gave Alm0st two replacement labels he personally printed up for the cartridges, then directed him to NES-world where he could show off the find, and take proper credit for his discovery. He tried to sell one of the two remaining copies for \$120, but no one wanted to purchase it at that price (most likely because of the issues with the label), so he placed an auction on ebay which was promptly shut down as it violated ebay's listing policy. Shortly after, the cartridge was sold/traded to NESAholic for \$100 and a handful of PAL exclusive titles. The third copy still re-

mains in his possession, but pa_nes_ian eventually resold his copy to Michael242 when he decided to stop collecting NES games.

Of course, with NES collecting at an all-time peak (both in the number of collectors, and in price!), dozens more Zelda test cartridges have appeared and sold for a wide range of prices. As recently as 2008, though, the market has proven that people generally don't know what this game is worth, with one being sold, improperly listed, for a budget-rate to our e-Zine designer MeWithoutYou52 in a large lot, and another going to editor-in-chief Dangevin for a once-in-a-lifetime \$15 Buy-it-Now on eBay. Indeed, this particular test cartridge seems to be one of the most common among its ilk, although arguably its high profile may draw more copies out to market than the inauspicious, yet overwhelmingly scarcer Duck Hunt test cartridge.



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NintendoAGE eZine Volume 2 Issue 5: June 2008
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