

On the Wings of Pegasus

Friday afternoon. Back from school. The history lady has announced a Middle Ages test for Monday, but there's a problem because I've only just caught up with the empire of Alexander the Great. Still, it's Friday, the school bag lands in the corner and myself in front of the TV. A console pad in hand and the dilemma: should it be *Contra* or *Bomberman* first? Maybe *Contra* after all. Besides the games, there's a whole weekend ahead to plan! It's before 3 pm, so in a moment there should be a repeat of *Denver, the Last Dinosaur* on Channel Two, though in the evening it's *The Dating Game*, unfortunately, so it's Mum's TV time. And Dad's a little earlier, because the comedy show *Zulu Gula* is on before 7 pm. Luckily, it's Friday, so the bedtime cartoon is *Smurfs*. Tomorrow, a TV feast awaits! *Walt Disney Presents* around noon and another episode of *Darkwind Duck*. That's my favourite cartoon! Alas, the afternoon is boring, what with my sister's *Beverly Hills 90210* and *Dr Quinn. Medicine Woman* immediately afterwards. That means everyone will be there watching. Then, there's *Charming Couples* at 10 pm, but I don't like those dating shows. The host—Krzysztof Ibisz, I guess—is handsome, but he's sure not to look that good in twenty years. Maybe I'll be able to wheedle at least a few minutes of *DD's Little Evening News* at 7 pm. And on Sunday, after *TeleExpress*, the hit *Funniest Home Videos*. People videotape themselves doing stupid things and then show it to others, can you believe it? Such a format certainly won't survive long. Then, *Chip 'n Dale Rescue Rangers* airs for bedtime and, well... it's Monday again and the Middle Ages. Fortunately, I'll get to see the next episode of *Alf* after school.

In the Polish realities of the 1990s, the television set was a literal vehicle of pop-cultural transformation. The proliferating new formats of television shows were usually based on Western licences. They were enriched by a growing number of ready-made productions for children and young people, animations and teenage series in the main. Television went from being a tool of information to pure entertainment. The appearance of the so-called video game consoles on the Polish market was a symbolic step too, significantly adding to the functionalities of TV sets.

Here, the crucial story concerns the “Polish console”, the famous Pegasus marketed in the early 1990s by a company called Bobmark International. Although a range of gaming platforms—Commodore 64, ZX Spectrum or Amiga computers—had already been available in Poland since the 1980s, it was the inconspicuous Pegasus which ushered in a true decade of console gaming. The 1990s witnessed the successive launches of devices designed for virtual gamertainment. Pegasus was based on its Japanese-American counterpart: the Nintendo console, known as Famicom in Japan and the Nintendo Entertainment System in the US. The homegrown Pegasus—originally codenamed MT-777DX—became a genuine hit on the Polish market. In total, more than 1,000,000 units sold at today’s price of PLN 150.

The history of Pegasus is first and foremost a chapter in the Polish pursuit of world-class entertainment, with all its legal complexities. The Bobmark console was nothing more than an unlicensed Nintendo clone. Its presence fuelled a growing market of not entirely legal video games + involving so-called cartridges, available in spades at almost every “bazaar” (marketplace) stall. The twilight of Pegasus and its numerous, somewhat modified clones known as PolyStation, Terminator or Hunter, came in the mid-1990s, following the introduction of more rigorous copyright laws in Poland and the entry of official distributors of consoles and games onto our market. Gamers were thus offered more advanced platforms, such as the Super Nintendo Entertainment System, Sega Mega Drive, Sony PlayStation and Sega Saturn.

For a whole generation of children and young people in the early 1990s, the sessions in front of the TV with a Pegasus pad in hand and parents as an audience on the living room sofa became some of the core memories, just as in the Pegasus’ advertising slogan: “Family Game!”.

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Thirty years ago, you could watch different programs, cartoons, and series on TV. They were similar to those from other countries. You could also play games that appeared on the TV screen. After school, children would sit in front of the TV and play these games. The most popular gaming device was the Pegasus console. It was a Polish console, but it worked the same as the foreign Nintendo console.