A speedrunner’s quest to (re)build the perfect N64 controller

A good video game speedrun is a marvel to witness. You watch players fly through your favorite games, hitting impossible jumps and finding shortcuts you never knew existed. It makes you see a familiar game in a whole new light. If you’ve never watched a speedrun, check out this world-record run through the original *Super Mario Bros.*, and you’ll see what I’m talking about. Being, you know, a speedrun, it’ll take all of five minutes of your time.

But what you *won’t* see (unless you follow speedrunners on Twitch) is the hours upon hours of work it took to create that perfect run — the thousands of attempts to navigate a game with perfect precision, shaving off every unnecessary move, exploiting every weird glitch. It’s punishing work for the player — and for the controller they use run after run, day after day. And all that “grinding,” as speedrunners call it, is taking an unexpected toll.

On this episode of *The Vergecast,* we explore a looming crisis in the Nintendo 64 speedrunning community: players are grinding their controllers to plastic dust and at such a quick pace that optimal N64 controllers are growing scarce. We also speak with Beck Abney (abney317 on Twitch), a *Mario Kart 64* speedrunning legend who is dealing with an even more bizarre, personal form of controller hell.

This also happens to be the first episode in our “Five Senses of Gaming” miniseries, so stay tuned every Sunday this month for another gaming story about another sense. And yes, if you

read that sentence and thought *Really? Smell? Taste!?*, well… buckle up.

If you want an even deeper dive into the wild world of speedrunning, here are some links to get you started:

https://www.theverge.com/24146590/n64-speedrunning-mariokart-controllers-joysticks-world-records