8Bit-16Bit-32Bit-8Bit-16Bit-32Bit

Bit Age Times #3

8Bit-16Bit-32Bit-8Bit-16Bit-32Bit

(A newsletter for the Second Generation of Video Games)

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A Mailing List

Anyone looking for a good mailing list for systems from the NES to the Megadrive to the Mega CD and everything in between, should check out the NEOP Classic Mailing list. It can be joined by sending a mailing list to Neo_classic-subscribe@topica.com. There are currently 70+ members , so you get a nice selection of views and opinions. Check it out!

NEO GEO Review

This month I decided to review a sports game. While most people only talk about the plethora of fighting games on the NEO GEO, they often overlook the small, but enjoyable selection of sports games. Many of these are predecessors to the NFL Blitz and NBA Jam series, where they took regular sports and super charged them.

Baseball Stars 2

Think of your typical baseball game. You pretty much have the basic batter vs pitcher and then the fielding. While there are some minor differences from one game to another, they are all essentially the same. Then you have Baseball Stars 2, which is a loud, wild, supercharged game!

While the basic gameplay is your typical baseball game, the characters are very large and quite animated! While there are only six teams to choose from, this does allow the game to have a large variety of different players who actually do look different. There are quite a few differences, including different hair styles, facial hair, skin color and hair color. This adds to the game as you play more, you get to know different players and their abilities.

One thing that sets this game apart from other baseball games is the extra enhancements. The big one being the super charged mode. When you are batting, you can use some points that you accumulate to super charge your player. With this, your normal baseball bat becomes a huge bat. It almost looks like the unholy union of an aluminum bat and a whiffle bat. If you don't hit the ball out with this bat, you are hurting. Just remember that the computer or your opponent also has super charged points and they will also use it against you. I found that it is best to walk a super charged player. Even if the bases are loaded, one run is better than the three or four you will usually give up. So keep this in mind as the computer is quite deadly with a super charged batter.

The game is loaded with lots of funny little animations. Strike out and a player breaks his bat. Get called out running to a base and he will argue with the umpire. Things like this add to the

game. Only wish they did more animations for each thing to add some variety. If a player struck out and sometimes would slam his bat down or throw his helmet, instead of just busting the bat over his knee, it would be a little more interesting. But this is a minor gripe in an otherwise great game!

All in all, Baseball Stars 2 is a fun and supercharged baseball game. It is alot like mixing MTV with baseball, but it is actually a good mix. Now that you can play it on MAME and not fork over the $200.00 for a cart, there is no excuse to ignore this wild and wacky game!

Christmas Games

By Fred Wagaman

I figured now would be as good as time as any to discuss all the Christmas games that have been published over the years.

Umm. Let's see.

Uhhh. Hmmm.

There really haven't been any Christmas games published over the years. What's up with that ? There are a couple of games in the Bit Age that did have Santa Claus in them.

The first is James Pond 3 for the Genesis. In this game, you played the super secret carp in a quest to save Christmas by going to the North Pole and fighting renegade toys. It's been a long time since I played this one and it didn't leave much of an impression.

The second is Clay Fighter 63 1/3 for the Nintendo 64. You end up fighting "Sumo" Santa in his toy factory. Believe me, seeing the ol' Fat Boy in just a loin cloth will have you calling Jenny Craig faster than you can say "Christmas Cookies".

There was one game that did have a Christmas theme (sort of). A special version of "Nights" for the Sega Saturn was available at Blockbuster and was included in a magazine. This single level version of game had you collecting Christmas balls, freeing the dream powers from evergreen trees and it decorated the landscape with snow and candy canes. The background story also took on a Christmas theme as well. But I believe they referred to it as the Winter Festival. As you beat the game, you were given a number of chances to win presents in a matching game based on your performance during the game. The Saturn system stores the date in its memory, and this version of the game is only available when your Saturn's calendar thinks its December. (I believe it does something different on Valentine's and April Fool's day, but I could be wrong). If you've never played this game, pick a copy up this year and give it a try. You won't be disappointed.

So why are there so few Christmas games published. I think there are a couple of reasons. First, game manufacturers do not want to limit the shelf life of their products. Would you buy a game with a Christmas theme in May ? Second, not everyone celebrates Christmas the same way. I don't know if Santa is popular in Japan. And I have never seen a game focusing on Hanukkah or Kwanzaa or the Festival of the Greens. So a Christmas themed game would not only limit you shelf time but also limit your audience.

It's quite possible that I've missed games that have some sort of tie-in to Christmas. If so, let me know and I'll make note of it in a future issue of BAT.

Fred also notes that there has been one game with a Thanksgiving theme (sort of). The arcade game "Turkey Shoot" is available in a semi-working state on MAME. Mutant Turkeys Gangsters run around on the screen. When shot, they take on the form of the traditional stuffed bird before they disappear completely. Any comments about cruelty to animals can be sent to fcw3@postoffice.ptd.net.

Bit-Age Addiction

by Doug Saxon

The object of most of the games from the Retro-Age was to score the most points. Games like Kaboom, River Raid, Atlantis, Pac-Man, etc. all shared a common objective: Get points. The game ended when the player ran out of lives, and play would go on indefinitely if there were an infinite amount of lives. Now there were a few games like Pitfall II and ET, where points were secondary to finishing the game, but games of this genre were in the minority. But they were in the majority during the Bit-Age.

I had my Atari 2600 when I was in grade school, probably 3rd or 4th grade. I played it alot, and I really did enjoy it. Interestingly enough, my favorite game for it was Pitfall II, as I really got hooked on this idea of "finishing the game." I actually played ET quite a bit too. Then in middle school I got my Nintendo and a little bit later my Sega Master System. And this is around the time when my video gaming went out of control. There was something about these games with a definite ending that had me hooked. There was always something to do, a sword to be found, a boss to be killed, a level to finish, etc. For example, I would be sitting in Pre-Algebra class thinking about nothing other than how I am going to beat the boss on the 5th level of Zelda. And then I would come home and play until bedtime. Finally, after who knows how many hours, I would beat these games and the credits would come up and after some lame music, "The End" would be displayed. And you would think, "All that time, thinking, frustration, just for that??" Yep. Ahh, what a great sense of completeness.

Over Thanksgiving Break I had lots of time to kill at home, and I broke out the old Nintendo and figured I'd play some of those old games. Decided to play Ninja Gaiden and it ended up consuming an entire afternoon. After about 30 minutes, I made it to the last level, but I kept dying, and dying, and dying, and dying. There are 3 bosses at the end of the game, and everytime you die, you must start 3 levels back and work your way through all 3 levels again. A couple times out of frustration I almost threw the machine out the window, but something kept me going, something kept me playing (and dying), until about 2 hours later, I finally finished it, and got to see, "The End." How rewarding. And then what did I do after this? Plugged in Ninja Gaiden II, and did the same thing all over again!

The beauty of the Retro-Age games is the simplicity and the quickness. A good game of Kaboom takes only 5 minutes. But you just can't play games like Ninja Gaiden for 5 minutes, because it will leave you with a sense of incompleteness. Nothing would have gotten me to turn that game off on the last level...nothing, except finishing it. So I could go on and write for hours about this stuff, just as I can play this stuff for hours! But if you ever have some time (an entire afternoon perhaps), throw in one of those epic Nintendo games, and just see how easily you can get sucked in.

Nintendo and Emulators

Anyone who has been in the emulation scene for awhile, knows how much Nintendo hates them and fights them. While I can understand this for the Nintendo 64 and Gameboy emulators (both are still very viable platforms) and can somewhat for the Super Nintendo, I think that emulators are necessary for the Nintendo 8-Bit. Before you brand me an idiot, listen to my reasoning.

One of the things that the Nintendo brought to the home console market that didn't exist before was the ability to save your game. Now, you could have huge adventure games and complex war games and didn't have to make the player decide if they wanted to keep their television on constantly or just start over the next time they had an opportunity. Games like the Koei series, Final Fantasy, Legend of Zelda and others allowed you to save the game, and some even allowed you to have multiple games going. This added a whole new dimension to the games and a feature that was strictly reserved for the home computers.

While this was a good thing, there was an inherent problem with this. These saved games needed a battery backup to store them and batteries have limited shelf life. While this wasn't a problem then, now more than 10 years after many of these games came out, copies of them that you find have expired batteries. Sure, you could change the batteries (this means taking the cart apart, not as easy a task as it sounds) or the other alternative is emulators! Now you can play games like Final Fantasy, Legend of Zelda and Genghis Khan and save your game anytime! No more worrying about if they battery is going to die on you. An added bonus is that you don't have to worry about the flickering problem with the original Nintendo!

So there is another reason why emulators are useful and becoming more and more necessary. Of course, good compilations would also solve this, but I haven't seen these companies do that yet. So until someone decides to compile these onto a CD for one of the newer game systems, this is the best way to be able to fully enjoy these games.

A few sites that carry Nintendo roms are:

Planet Nes: http://www.nes.cx/

Vimm's Lair: http://vimm.net/

The Fanatical Following of the Turbo Graphx

Like the rock star who dies and gains more fame in death than in life, so is the story of the Turbo Graphx, at least in the United States. When this system was out, it was always a distant third. The Genesis and the Nintendo 8-Bit were always ahead of it. While the system did great in Japan, it never really caught on here. Whether it was a matter of software or marketing or whatever, it just didn't get the respect it deserved.

But now that all the systems are no longer in production, the Turbo Graphx is the one that gets the most respect! While Nintendo 8-Bits and Sega Genesis's are a dime a dozen and the games average a few bucks a piece at most, the Turbo Graphx is hot and the system alone commands over $30.00 and sometime alot more. Games average about $10.00 each, with some going as low as $5.00, but many selling for $20.00 and more! And the handheld, the Turbo Express, is worth alot more than the Sega Nomad.

But why does the Turbo Graphx remain so popular and so valuable when other systems have lost almost all of their value? While I cannot read minds, I think it is a combination of great games and limited supply. While there are Sega Genesis and Nintendo's everywhere, it is a rare find to find anything for the Turbo Graphx. Go to any flea market, video game resale shop or even on the internet and see how few of these are up, in relation to the other systems of the era. So there is a scarcity of them available. This is due to a few factors. The first being there were alot less sold in this country. While you can still find Sega Genesis and were able to buy new Nintendo's only a few years ago, the Turbo Graphx came and went in less than five years. Another reason is that many collectors and gamers have kept their systems, so there are fewer in the secondary market. So these add up to a hard to find system. But history has shown that it isn't always rarity that makes for the value of an item. Some tough to find systems like the Action Max, CDi and even the 3DO (not real tough, but probably as rare as the Turbo Graphx) don't have as much value. So there must be more to it than scarcity alone.

The second reason the Turbo Graphx is so coveted is that there are some great games on the system. Many of which are only available for the Turbo Graphx. While some of the games were found on other systems (Bonk was ported to the NES and Space Harrier was also available for the Genesis), some of the most valuable and memorable games were only found on the Turbo Graphx. Games like Devil's Crush, which is probably the best pinball game ever and Military Madness, which was one of the best strategy war games on any system. Add in some other fun games like the Bonk series (three in all), the Legendary Axe series and the great arcade translations like Space Harrier, Dragon Spirit, R-Type and Splatterhouse. Don't forget one of the best reasons to get a Turbo Graphx, Bomberman!!!!!!!! Possibly the best version can be found on the Turbo Graphx and this along with Devil's Crush make for a worthwhile purchase!

Another reason for the popularity of the system is that the addition of the CD Drive (it was the first console to offer a CD Drive), you have more games available. Then there is a huge selection of great games that were made overseas, where the Turbo Graphx was a very popular system. Some games like Dracula X are highly sought and add to the desire of the system. Plus, the Turbo Express is one of the best handhelds ever made and runs all of the cart games. Plus, an overlooked reason, but one that I like is the fact that the games fit in a CD case (which they were sold in) and make for easy storage. While a cosmetic reason like that probably has little to do with the general thinking of a gamer, it doesn't detract either.

With these reasons, I think you can see why the system remains hot and has retained more of its value than most other systems. It is also a system that will continue to keep its value and probably go up. So if you have not looked into a Turbo Graphx system, you may want to. It offers alot of great gameplay and will probably be more expensive as the years go by.

Site of the Month

This month's site is dedicated to one of my all-time favorite games. This game took up countless hours of my life and will forever be among my favorite games. It is none other than Dungeon Master and the site is the Dungeon Master Web. The URL is: http://freespace.virgin.net/daniel.durgan/.

If you ever played this revolutionary game (it may not seem like alot now, but it was huge back then), then you owe it to yourself to check it out. It was the first real time role playing game and revolutionized the RPG industry. Countless imitators came later like the Eye of the Beholder series and even the Ultima Underworlds. Before Dungeon Master, almost all role playing games were in the Bard's Tale vein. They were turn based, where you had time to decide what move to do next. But in Dungeon Master, the monsters were coming after you and you had to hurry up and decide what to do or die. There was no time to sit around and think about what to do, you had to do it.

This site does a wonderful job of offering tips, downloads of the game, maps and more! There is a bulletin board, some cool animations from the game and even some new levels that other people created! So if you are a fan of Dungeon Master or someone who wants to find out about this groundbreaking game, then check out the Dungeon Master Web and have a great time!

Computer Game Review

A new feature I am going to add is to review a Bit Age computer game. These will usually be games that were offered on either the Atari ST or the Commodore Amiga. If this goes over well, I may expand it to feature a few games.

North and South

This wargame was unlike most wargames that came out. While your typical war game was very serious and required alot of time to complete, this one was lighthearted and a fast play. As you can guess from the title, it was a Civil War based game. But it is unlike any Civil War game that came before or even after it.

The game starts off with humorous little cartoons and from this you can easily figure out that this is not your father's war game. You start out by choosing some options. Some of them was whether or not you wanted Indians in the game and weather. The Indians were pretty much neutral, but if you bothered them too much, they would throw a very large tomahawk at you and hurt your troops. When you were done choosing the mode you were going to play, a man took a picture of the screen and off you went to the game.

Part of the game involved actual battles where you would line up your cannons and then send out your infantry and horsemen. The other parts included trying to take over their fort or trains which was a more arcade like game. In this, you had to overcome obstacles while your opponent tried to stop you. If you got to the end in an allotted amount of time, you won. Otherwise the fort or train would remain in their possession.

There were also other factors that added to the game. The more states you controlled, the more soldiers you would get. There was also aid from France that came. Whoever owned the state when the ship came, got the extra troops.

While some people may be put off by the mixture of arcade game and war game, I personally found it enjoyable. This lighthearted approach made for a fun game and the average game only took about an hour. Besides the Atari ST and Commodore 64, North and South was also ported to the Nintendo 8-Bit, but I never tried that version. It is a game worth checking out and will give you some good entertainment!

Conclusion

This is the first issue that was released on its own and I feel it is a pretty good issue. We will continue to expand coverage and are always looking for more submissions and suggestions. There are alot of great games in the Bit Age and I will do my best to point these out. Just because a system is dead, doesn't mean it should be forgotten!

Next month, I hope to do a feature on one of my favorite companies of the Bit Age, Cinemaware! They created alot of memorable games and their blend of gameplay and cinema storytelling was both innovative and engrossing! So tune in for this and more great coverage of the second generation of video games, the Bit Age!

Tom Zjaba