

## Bit Age Times

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### The Unfortunate Truths About Video Games

Having been a gamer since the days of Pong, I have found out that there are some truths that have remained constant through the years. I decided to share these with you. Think of them as a Murphy's Law for video games.

Truth #1-No matter how great your system is, it is only a few years from being obsolete.

Truth #2-Even the worst games ever made have fans.

Truth #3-Even the best games ever made have critics.

Truth #4-Great gameplay can mask bad graphics, but great graphics cannot mask bad gameplay

Truth #5-The graphics on the back of the box are rarely the same as the game you are buying.

Truth #6-Systems become commercially dead, but never truly dead. There is always someone out there playing every system.

Truth #7-We will never see a game that truly gives you "total freedom", at least until holodecks are invented.

Truth #8-Video games rarely retain their value. Like most items, you will get less for them than what you paid, usually alot less.

Truth #9-The only way to play all the best games is to own all the systems.

Truth #10-The games that have the most chance of being worth money are the games you did not buy.

Truth #11-Like Hollywood, most video game sequels suck.

Truth #12-No matter how much research you do, you will eventually end up buying a bad game.

Truth #13-If a game sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

Truth #14-Very few games ever use all the space available to them, most use less than half the space.

Truth #15-Even the best companies can make a terrible title and even the worst companies can make a great title.

Truth #16-The game you just bought will most likely be on sale next week.

Truth #17-The chances of your system going bad, increases dramatically if you do not get a extended warranty.

### Keep the Bat, I Wanna Manage!

There is a plethora of games for people who want to step in the shoes of a professional baseball, football or any other athlete. You have your share of opportunities to make the winning basket, hit the game winning home run or to throw the touchdown pass in overtime. But what if you are more interested in managing the team and leaving the playing to the players? What choices are there for you?

In the past, there were little to no choices for the manager. Some games offered limited managerial play, but it was usually limited to one season and involved mostly setting the lineup. That has all changed in recent years and now there is a wide variety of sports simulations available! Granted almost all are for the computer, but even the consoles are getting closer to offering the thrill that us wanna be managers are looking for. New games like All-Star Baseball 2003 and the Madden series have features that allow us a chance to prove our theories. All you need is pitching to win in baseball, right? Time for you to show just how easy (being very sarcastic here) it is to pick up a stud pitcher.

Despite how more advanced the aforementioned games are, they do not hold a candle to two of the best sports simulation games out there. Since we are Americans and soccer is not a popular professional sport in this country, I will not concentrate on the best simulation game of all, Championship Manager (you can see a review of the first version in Bit Age Times #5). Instead, I am going to concentrate on the two much more popular sports, American Football and Baseball. I have two games that are so incredible that it would be a crime to miss these, if you are a fan of simming sports games.

#### [Out of the Park 4](#)

The first game is Out of the Park and the newest version comes out on March 1st (which should be about when this newsletter is released). The series is up to version 4 and is without a doubt, the best game for sim crazy gamers, like myself. Markus Heinsohn, the developer of the game is probably the most accessible programmer that you will ever come in contact with. He listens to all the comments about the game and keeps releasing patches to fix any problems as well as improve the game.

The game allows you to play out a season with the team of your choice. One nice feature is that you can sim the team for as long as you want! Want to play up to the days of the Jetsons, go for it! Even better is that you can download old time baseball rosters and recreate the entire history of baseball if you wish. You can even see what would happen if Babe Ruth remained a pitcher, what a healthy Mark McGwire could have done or what if Herb Score never got hit in the face by a pitch. The what ifs you could play out are worth the price of admission alone.

While last year's version was great, this year's version (just downloaded it today, as you can see, this article was written over a few days) offers a ton of improvements! Players demand trades, you have to battle with other teams for free agents, you can even put a salary cap in place! My favorite new feature is the ability to switch eras, so you can see how these new guys would stack up in a deadball period (the time of baseball prior to 1920, a time that I would love to see, when pitchers dominated). This game is so incredible and it keeps getting better as people offer full rosters (to keep the price down, the retail version, which is a download, does not come with official MLB players, logos or team names), logos and even player photos, so with a few downloads, you can have a game with all your favorite players and more gameplay than any commercial release. This tremendous game can be downloaded at the following URL: <http://www.ootp4.com>

#### [Front Office Football](#)

This is to football, what Out of the Park is to baseball, except for the constant attention that Markus gives to OOTP. While the game is an Electronic Arts game, it is unlike any EA Sports game. It is a full blown simulator that allows you to take over an NFL team and go the distance! In the 2000 edition, I was able to take the lowly Arizona Cardinals from a second rung team to one of the elite in football. With some carefully planned drafts and development, I was able to win six Super Bowls in a 35 year period! I put almost 10 players into the Hall of Fame (they have team and league Hall of Fames) and had to expand into a much bigger stadium! I will give you my secret, one that many NFL teams still ignore, build a solid offensive line and everything else will fall in place. I took a page from the 1980's Rams, 1990's Broncos and the Pittsburgh Steelers, build a big solid line and keep drafting and grooming players for it and you do not need a great running back. I just wish my lowly Cleveland Browns would learn this (in the three years since they came back, they drafted a total of one offensive lineman, in the seventh round, stupid, very stupid).

One of the best parts of this game is the negotiations. You have a salary cap and need to keep below it. But you end up with free agents and you can barter with them. Before they become free agents, you can try and get them for a lower price and lock them up for multiple years. Depending on how good your team is, how much playing time they get and how much they feel they are worth, you can sometime talk them down a bit. But if you let them into free agency and they are any good, forget it. Especially solid offensive linemen, they can get very expensive.

Another nice feature is trading for draft picks. You can even trade during the draft! Is that running back you were hoping would slide to you gone? Then trade down and try to get a second or third round pick. Or you can even move that first round pick and try to get a solid veteran. The other teams will also offer you trades. You really need to be on your toes or soon you will find your team in deep doo doo. Plus, you have to worry about coaches and scouts. ignore them and they become free agents too.

If that is not enough, you can move your team to a different market or try to get a better stadium. How cool is that? Add in career records, hall of fame voting and more and you have one deep game! The creators of FOF have even created a version for College Football! For more information on this incredible game, check out the website of the creators: <http://www.solecismic.com/>

### **PLUG'N PLAY**

*Or: confessions of a geriatric old videogame fan  
with a serious fetish for cartridges*

By [David Cuciz](#)

I'm old. I mean, *really* old: all 33 of it. I'm lucky to be a human being (sort of) because had I been a piece of computer hardware I'd be either gathering dust in a dark cellar or acting as landfill. At best, I'd be in a museum. As someone who has embraced the Computer Age from the beginning, I've seen hardware going from 1 MHz, 48K RAM machines to the monsters we take for granted today, whose computing power was once the realm of high-level research labs or intelligence agencies, and games going from black-and-white blocky low-res things with bleeps and warbles for sound to the lifelike graphics and stereo surround experiences of today.

Ah, yes: games. I'm a videogame fan, ever since the time we used to call them "videogames" and we had to play them at the arcades. I'm still a fan and always will be, even if my reflexes aren't what the used to be at 16 I can still play a game of *Battlezone* (the original one) with the best of them and I'm a good hand with *Unreal* in most of its incarnations. I bought *Unreal Tournament* in budget edition, and it came on two CD-ROMs. Two shiny, silvery disks: they almost looked unreal (no pun intended) even though CD-ROMs have been the standard for years now, and they are just now being slowly phased out in favor of the DVD-ROM format. Before, there were 3.5" floppy disks and before them, 5.25" disks - which were truly "floppy" in that you could bend them if you really wanted. Before disks,

there were tapes - *audio* tapes. But for my generation, games will always be related to the cartridge first and foremost.

Videogames in cartridge form have been around since 1976 when the Fairchild Channel F was launched, but many of us became familiar with the format through the immense popularity of the Atari VCS. Every console since then, through the Great Crash of '84 and up to the introduction of CD-ROMs as media in the early '90s has used cartridges of some kind and for good reasons: they are reliable, sturdy, the data they store can't be corrupted by EM fields as is the case with tapes and floppy disks, and they are extremely hard to copy. It can be done, though, with the right equipment, but it needs organization and in fact Nintendo, on account of the piracy problem, held on with cartridges when everyone was jumping on the CD-ROM bandwagon. They are also expensive to make because they need hardware components like ROM chips and often more, while CD-ROMs only have to store data.

We, the users, have heard the words "Plug'n Play" applied to almost everything to Operating Systems to peripherals, from Amiga Zorro cards to ISA, PCI and AGP cards to USB devices, but the only true "Plug'n Play" component EVER is the game cartridge: you just slide it into its slot, turn the power on and that's all there is to it. Nothing to install, no setup required, no loading time; and when you have finished playing, you turn it off and remove the cartridge. There's nothing that simple in computer world, they crash VERY rarely and they're virus-free. Cartridges are also very, very durable: they can take abuse like no other media can, and still work. You can't say the same with CD-ROMs, which can be wrecked fairly easily.

And cartridges have personality which, as Jules Winnfield would say, goes a long way: you'd be hard pressed to tell a PSX CD-ROM from a Dreamcast GD-ROM or a PS2 DVD-ROM from a X-Box DVD-ROM, and if size wouldn't be an issue the GameCube's mini DVD-ROM would be just another Shiny Disk. Throw a dozen of game disks on the ground and try to find the one game you want among them with a single look.

With cartridges, you can: you can tell a SNES cartridge from a SMS cart by feel alone, and you can pick up the golden Zelda cartridge among a score of other NES games without looking twice. It's impossible to mistake an Intellivision cart for a Colecovision one, and you're not going to stick a Vectrex cart into a N64 console. The *Pokémon Yellow* Game Boy cartridge looks almost like one of those computer carts seen in the original *Star Trek* (so, that's what Mr Spock was doing whenever he looked into that scope on the *Enterprise* bridge).

Cartridges are a link between the physical world of hardware and the ethereal space of software: hold a Zelda cart in your hands and you can almost feel like you're holding the whole land of Hyrule, and you wouldn't be wrong: all of the game's software is engraved within its plastic boundaries, the life of its inhabitants suspended in non-volatile RAM.

Now, don't take me for a nostalgic old fart because I'm not. I've never owned a console most of my life, concentrating on computers, but the first computer I have owned - a Commodore VIC-20 - featured a cartridge slot which was used for RAM expansion, graphic enhancement pack and solid-state software like the Assembler and FORTH language carts. And, of course, games like *Jupiter Lander* and *Protector*, two favorites of mine. This old machine taught me a healthy respect for cartridges because, you see, most of the VIC-20 games came on tapes - *audio* tapes which were to be loaded into RAM through the Datassette tape recorder/player. Loading times ranged from 2 to 20 minutes and sometimes more; when I bought a 1541 disk drive - a horrendously slow, heavy and expensive piece of equipment - I managed to cut loading times by a factor of ten but some games refused to work with the disk drive and when I graduated to the C128, the heavier code that even the C64 games required due to the larger RAM size meant even longer loading times.

But cartridges were another matter: plug it in, turn on, and the title screen came on in less than two seconds.

The first console I've bought was a Game Boy Pocket, a couple of years ago, and only because they were heavily discounted and you could pick up one for less than ten bucks, but as soon as I got one and the Asteroids-Missile Command cartridge I was hooked. Later I bought a GBC and I'm still hooked: cartridge-based games are entertainment without fuss, and there is even more to them.

You see, the cartridge is not JUST the game. Carts more often than not have non-volatile RAM built into them to save games: disk-based consoles have to rely on external memory cards. They can have internal clocks, custom circuitry to enhance the game graphics and more: with carts, you can add *hardware* to the console. The GBC version of *Perfect Dark* has a rumble pack built in. The new *Pokémon* games have built-in clocks. The cartridge add functionality and features to the console without the user having to physically upgrade it.

So, why are cartridges on their way out? Well, to put it bluntly their cost-effectiveness is fairly low: you can store 650 MB of game code and data on a CD-ROM at practically no cost, while even a 2MB cart requires a lot more money to manufacture, both in terms of worktime and infrastructure cost. You need hardware components, specialized tooling and a controlled environment to make one, while a CD can be burned almost anywhere. If *Gran Turismo 3* were to be released as a cartridge, its price would be horrendously high and high retail prices and games do not mix well - witness what happened to the otherwise brilliant SNK Neo Geo console.

There is also a natural tendency of the industry toward a standard, a role which optical storage media fulfills. CDs and DVDs are both cheap *and* durable, while magnetic media is cheap but not durable and cartridges are durable but no longer cheap. Consoles have also gone from very simple machines with only basic components installed to high-spec devices which do not need extra support anymore: most games released today for the newer platforms don't have to push the hardware to its fullest to reach the desired effect, while the limitations of yesterday's consoles required game developers to make the most of the available resources.

So, are game cartridges' days numbered? In the present form yes. The next decade will see the dominance of the optical storage format because of its simple cost-effectiveness and reliability, with cartridges still being viable for portable consoles like the Game Boy Advance. It's possible, though, that even that may change: we have MP3 players that can hold several MBs of data on them and sooner or later we will see a portable gaming platform that has all of its software stored on CD and uploaded to it from a PC via USB interface.

But there could be a future for cartridges, after all: holographic memory promised data storage on the Terabyte scale in small, solid-state modules. Who knows, in ten or more years we could see cartridge ports reappearing on PCs, in order to accommodate next generation game carts holding a truckload's worth of DVD space on a postage stamp-

size module along with optronic graphics processors and separate CPU in order not to task the host machine and its OS too much.

One can dream. Meanwhile, I'm off to *Battlezone* again.

## Hey, Where is My Game?

One of the biggest fads in the Bit Age was to take a famous person, show or character and turn it into a platform game or something even worse. Everyone from Wacky Races to Home Alone to Motley Crue to Jackie Chan had video games during this era. Most were not very good, a few were. But even with all the games made, there were still a handful of properties that were overlooked. Some shows and famous people were left off the gravy train and had to be outside looking in. Well, we decided it was time to give these forgotten souls a chance to shine. So here are the "VIDEO GAME IDEAS THAT TIME FORGOT!"



### VILLAGE PEOPLE VOLLEYBALL

Take a popular band and add a strange game concept and you get Village People Volleyball! You start off at the bottom and work your way up the ranks, until you go toe to toe with the dudes themselves. Not only are they tough to beat (the limp wrist spike is deadly), but you are forced to listen to a muzak version of YMCA, over and over.



### THE BOZ'S STONE COLD, THE GAME

Remember this former NFL player, Brian Bosworth, who is best remembered for being run over by Bo Jackson on Monday Night Football? You didn't honestly think we would give him a football game, did you? Instead, we create the typical Double Dragon clone out of his big (insert laugh track here) movie, Stone Cold! You control the Boz as you beat up all kinds of bad guys on your way to the end, where you try to fight the big movie executives and force them to make a sequel.

### BASEBALL CARD BUYING BUST

Do you remember the big buying frenzy over baseball cards? Of course you do! You still have a closet full of kindling. Well, we will give you a chance to recreate that awful investment (for you people who bought them to pay for your kid's college, I two words for you "US Military". That is the only way your kids will not end up fry cooks for the rest of their lives, or worse yet, sports card dealers).

The game plays like a stock market simulator. You start off with \$10,000 and it runs for 5 years. It is your job to buy and sell baseball cards. Do you invest in hall of famers, complete sets or Billy Ripken error cards? The winner is the person who ends up with the most cards that are worth the least amount of money. Remember, quantity over quality.

### PUNK ROCK DRESS UP GAME

The idea of the game is to take normal kids and punk them out. Spike their hair, maybe bleach it. Rip up those jeans and put a safety pin through their nose. Then when you are done, you get to parade them past high society women and whoever makes the most ladies faint, is the winner!

**This is the End?**

by [Alan Hewston](#)

We all love to play video and computer games, so why not compile a list of ways that a game can end, or at least how one life/ship/car etc. ends. But this is not the typical list of you crashed and burned, or deserved to die. These are somewhat unusual, funny, tall tales, and sometimes never to be seen again phenomena. But seriously, some of these can happen, and here is your short lesson's learned on what can go wrong when playing your videogame. I hope that you enjoy our humor and warnings.

Actually - I had this started back in October, but we changed the title from "50 ways to lose your life", and pushed it back due to the tragedy of 9/11/01. Hopefully you will not be offended by these in any way. Many thanks to Mat Allen

and Fred Wagaman for their suggestions, comments and additions, and I did not throw any away.

Let me clump these into categories - somewhat like the X files - the truth is out there. Say, where's that X-Files game?

### [Natural Phenomena](#)

10. VCR taping your awesome high score attempt ran out of tape.
9. You blinked or sneezed at just the wrong time.
8. You played too hard and bumped or pulled on the game machine and powered it off.
7. Too much vibration from the rumble pack and down it went.
6. You played so hard that you broke the controller.
5. Internet connection got broken - for online games.
4. Something blocked or interfered with your remote controller signal.
3. Pause button did not work right.
2. Memory card error when saving.
1. Cartridge Bit rot occurred on a really old cart at just the wrong time.

### [Acts of God](#)

10. Dog got excited on your leg, or cat rubbed along your leg.
9. Lightning strikes and spikes the system.
8. Earthquake, Flood, Tsunami, Tornado, Hurricane . . . whatever.
7. Disk drive loading error - and the game crashed.
6. CD player stopped working.
5. Overheating of the power supply or system and it died for good.
4. Power failure - game over.
3. Fire drill or house on fire - you'd better leave.
2. Game save feature didn't work and you didn't know it - game lost.
1. You had an itch and had to scratch it.

### [Evil Cult or Really Bad Karma](#)

10. Next player in line put their quarter up on the arcade machine and interrupted you.
9. Zigged when you should have zagged, or didn't pray to Bira Bira.
8. Your turbo booster or rapid fire mechanism kicked in or off when it wasn't supposed to.
7. Stuck in corner in game and couldn't move - yikes - SNES Jurassic Park.
6. Memory transfer error between US/Japanese versions of the game - never again on Pokemon.
5. Ran out of rockets and temporarily forget which button switches weapon.
4. Trying to get a screen shot of your high score in progress and died trying.
3. Should have bought more potions or forgot to equip with better armor/weapon.
2. Clock expired on the game's timer.
1. Thought your levels were high enough/forgot to save before big battle.

### [Paranormal](#)

10. Watching the X-Files on TV while playing - bad idea - lost focus.
9. Controller somehow came unplugged from game machine.
8. The instruction manual grew legs and walked away, never to be found.
7. Doorbell / telephone rang - and you were compelled to answer it.
6. Fully charged battery mysteriously died on your hand-held.
5. Dreaded 5200 analog controller moved when you didn't.
4. Joystick became possessed - had a mind of its own.
3. Hands became possessed, or muscle spasm / cramp - dropped the controller.
2. Strange or scary noise (children's toy speaking while playing resident evil) - must be the poltergeists.
1. The dreaded invisible bullet got you.

### [A Conspiracy - they're out to get you](#)

10. Boss caught you playing at work.
9. Too many bonus lives accumulated - rolled over 99 or 255 to 0 then quickly lost the final one.
8. The dreaded flickering sprites got you.
7. The arcade had to close for the night - go home kid.
6. Uh oh, they didn't program in a pause button and you died.
5. The Blue screen of death came over your system.
4. Sprite overlap - poorly programmed - you died even though the sprites weren't overlapping.
3. Out of memory error - or as in Tron . . . End of Line . . .
2. Game just outright cheated you. I hate when that happens.
1. Bizarre glitch in game that you died - and you NEVER saw it happen like that again.

### [Alien Abduction - oops we can't do that so - Human Nature](#)

10. Something in your eye, or contact lens dried, or eyes blurring, tearing.
9. Played so long that you fell asleep.
8. Your own child playing nearby distracted you or outright caused your on screen death.
7. Girlfriend or boyfriend got you turned on or distracted you.
6. Eating and/or drinking at the same time and lost focus.

5. Wife came over and turned the game off. Dooh!
4. Mother nature called and you had to stop and relieve yourself - or else.
3. You got bored, or even worse, your partner did and wasted you.
2. Your human partner killed you by accident - really - oh no Wizard of Wor.
1. OK, your human opponent admitted to killing you for the easy points - Wizard of Wor again.

Feel free to tell us some of your favorite stories about how the game ended.

*(Alan Hewston has finally written for the BAT - probably because he's finally getting some Amiga games, won a few TGFX auctions, and now owns a Sega Dreamcast - his first venture into the 64 bit / golden era of videogames. He can be reached at: [hewston95@stratos.net](mailto:hewston95@stratos.net)).*

## Now Those Were Programmers

Back in my days of the Atari ST, I found many great games. But of all the programmers and developers, there was only a few that were so good that I would buy their games, no questions asked. At the top of this most prestigious list was the Bitmap Brothers. These guys made some of my most favorite games for the Atari ST. From the enjoyable dungeon game, Cadaver to the highly addictive Speedball to the whimsical Magic Pockets, they churned out one great game after another. I knew if the Bitmap Brothers logo was on the game, it was going to be good.

Then I started to think that I have not seen anything from them in a long time. There was an updated Speedball game for the Playstation and Chaos Engine came out for some 16 Bit systems a ways back, but what once was a very prolific group had all but dropped out of the limelight. This is too bad as they had quite a run of great hits back in the late 1980's to early 1990's. I can still remember how much Gods drove me crazy. Those were some fine games.

I did some searching on the search engines and found that they are still around. But it looks like their future projects are more rehashes of earlier games. They have a Speedball game for the Gameboy Advance and a wargame based on World War 2. I was a bit bummed as I hoped to find some more original and exciting games on the horizon. If you want to check out the Bitmap Brothers website and take a look at some of their classic games, go to the following URL: <http://www.bitmap-brothers.co.uk/front.htm>

## Are We Too Spoiled?

As I check out the newsgroups and message boards to see what was written about some new PS2 games (State of Emergency, High Heat Baseball, All-Star Baseball, Drakan and Pirates, to be exact), I could not help but wonder if we as gamers are too spoiled. As I read complaint after complaint on the games, most of which were quite minor, it made me think that maybe people just expect too much from a video game. Let me give you some examples:

In State of Emergency, there is talk about how repetitive the gameplay can be and how dull it is to keep fighting all these enemies. But if you go back to the Bit Age, there was a whole industry around this very repetitive gameplay. Can you say Double Dragon? Can you say River City Ransom? I could go on and on about this, yet back then it was great fun, but now it is just dull, repetitive gameplay. Forget the fact that the environments are destructible (I know that in those old games, I wanted to throw a garbage can through the window of a car.

Another game, High Heat Baseball came out and was panned (by some, not everyone). While the gameplay is the same as last year's and that was considered the best out there and while the graphics have been improved as well as many other things, it was still panned by quite a few people (and even a few reviews were less than expected). Why? If it was so good in 2001 and this year's version retained all the positive features and improved other areas. But with games like All-Star Baseball, offering all kinds of extras, suddenly a nicer looking version of High Heat was not enough.

The point that I am trying to make is that gamers are spoiled. With these great new machines and nearly unlimited amount of room on DVDs, gamers expect the sun, the moon and a few stars. It seems like there are very few games that meet with the very high demands of today's gamers. Even the highly praised Metal Gear Solid 2 was deemed too short and had too many cut scenes. Oh well, guess there is just no pleasing some people.

## Conclusion

While this issue is a bit shorter than previous issues, I think it still has some good reading. Hope you enjoy our coverage of the Bit Age and Beyond games! I would like to thank my two new writers, David Cuciz and Alan Hewston. Hopefully this will be the start of more writers for BAT. That would make it much easier to make it a monthly newsletter. Time to go, so enjoy the new month. I know I will with Out of the Park 4 and All-Star Baseball 2003! Play Ball!

[-Tom Zjaba](#)