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Time for a Reality Check

There has been alot of flak given to video games as of late. With the huge success of Grand Theft Auto: Vice City and the recent shootings in Washington D.C. there has been alot of attention given towards violent video games. There is a good sized population who believes that violence of this level has no place in video games. They think that the video game market is for kids and the games should be made for children and children only. I have two words for these people....WAKE UP!

One large problem with our society is that they get an idea in their mind and forever they are closed to new thinking. For most people, the only visual image they have of video games is Mario or Pacman, who are for the most part, wholesome characters. They think of video games as a kids only market, much the same way that they view comic books and animation. But what they fail to realize is that the market has grown tremendously in the past decade and along the way, the average age of video game players has steadily gone up. Gone are the days when video games were for teenagers and younger. The average age of a video game player in this country is 28 years old. In case you are not too familiar with age limits, 28 is an adult, the same adult who enjoys more mature movies, music and television, but are expected to play children's games for the rest of their lives. Is it me or is this thinking so stupid it defies description? Why is it allright for people to watch The Sopranos or watch a movie like Goodfellas or Scarface, all of which are as violent, if not more violent than Grand Theft Auto: Vice City, yet it is not allright to play this game? They both appeal to the same kind of people, the same age groups, yet one is fine and one is not. Is that hypocritical or what?

One argument you will get is that video games are for children. Since Nintendo makes nice wholesome games that kids play, they should not allow mature video games. Kids may buy these other games and be corrupted. Excuse me, but does not Disney make nice wholesome movies for kids? Do these nice family movies not play in the same theatre as more mature movies? Can a kid not buy a ticket to a Disney movie and not wander into a mature movie? With this thinking, we should also ban all mature movies. While we are at it, why not ban all mature television programs, paperback books, music and anything else that may upset our fragile children and turn them into psychotic killing machines. We can spend all our time watching Barney and listening to Raffi for the rest of our lives. At some point, parents need to become responsible for what their children watch, listen and play and not expect censorship to do the parenting for them. Mature rated games, like films and music, are labeled and only meant to be sold to adults. If your child gets a hold of these games and plays them, then you are not doing a good enough job of teaching them what they can and cannot purchase. You are also not watching what they play and what they purchase. It is not the fault of the game company for making these games, it is the parents fault for not doing their job.

The other argument you hear is that these games make people violent and want to commit violent acts. That is the biggest hunk of hooey ever spouted. Reality check here, people have been killing each other for tens of thousands of years. Video games have only been around for 30 years. Every heard of Charles Manson, Jack the Ripper, Ted Bundy, Adolph Hitler, Jim Jones, the Boston Strangler, Son of Sam, Zodiac Killer, Nero and thousands of others who have committed murders, rape, torture and other acts against humanity, but never played a video game or listened to heavy metal music or any of the other stuff that people want to blame for societies ills.

To sum it all up, the video game market has and continues to mature. And with this maturation, comes a demand for more variety in gameplay and more games that cater to an adult crowd. Just as there is a big demand for mature movies, television shows and literature, there is also a demand for video games. Some of these games will be very violent or contain sexual themes or nudity or excessive language, just as their counterparts do in the other entertainment mediums. This is something that can and will happen and nothing short of banning video games entirely will prevent it. The public has spoken with their wallets (5 million Grand Theft Auto: Vice City sold in the first week) and the game companies have heard. The only things that need to be done is for the industry, especially on a retail level, to insure that it is adults buying these games. It is also necessary for parents to inform their kids to what is appropriate to play and what is not. They need to take an active role in what games are purchased and keep an eye on what they are playing.

One of the biggest holidays in video game history as come and gone. While many would argue that last year was a bigger deal due to the launch of two new systems, this year had more significance. With a year under their belts, it was time to see which system was going to take the lead and grab second place. It was also the year when we saw which direction the market would take in terms of mature games. So let us look back at what a big year and try to sort out what happened and why. Remember, like with all articles in this newsletter, these are based mostly on personal observations and should be taken as such. While I have a fair amount of dealings in the game industry, there is always lots of information that is kept secret.

**The War For Second Place**

Perhaps the biggest story of the holiday season was who would claim second place. While both companies can still easily win out, the X-Box is leading the race. It is still a very close race and one that can and possibly will switch before all is said and done.

While Nintendo came out with possibly one of the strongest lineups of first party games ever, they could not take out Microsoft and even lost their small lead. One may wonder how a company that released so many sure fire hits like Mario Sunshine, Metroid Prime, Star Fox Adventures and Mario Party 4 could lose, but that is exactly what happened. Why did it happen? Microsoft took a page from Sega's marketing strategy and utilized it to the fullest. When a person went into a store to buy a new game system and looked at the Gamecube and the X-Box, they saw something in the X-Box that swayed quite a few buyers. What they saw was a system that gave them more for their money. With only \$50.00 difference in price between the two systems, consumers saw one that was only a game system and came with no games and another that not only came with two free games, but also could double as a DVD player. It is pretty easy to see why more X-Boxes were sold than Gamecubes. A brilliant marketing strategy that worked much better for Microsoft than it ever did for Sega.

**Grand Theft Vice City**

How do you follow up one of the biggest selling games in history? By giving the gamers more of the same, but add a ton of enhancements, so many that it boggles the mind. While some gamers complained that it was pretty much the same game, even more found themselves captivated all over again. With a much bigger environment to explore, more and different vehicles and weapons and a soundtrack that eclipses anything else ever attempted, Rockstar found themselves with another huge hit and a bank account that can only be described as immense.

Now the question is whether or not another version of the game will sell as well. It certainly has the momentum and Rockstar has the money to deliver an even bigger game with another mammoth soundtrack and a ton more famous voices in the game. It will be interesting to see if they strike oil for a third time.

**Adult Games - Hit or Miss?**

Adult games hit the market with mixed results. While the Grand Theft series and The Getaway both did very well, others like BMX XXX was a failure. It proved that while mature themes can help sell a game, it takes a worthwhile game to have a hit. It also proved that the market does not want something that blatant out as Sony forced it to be censored and most of the major retail chains banned the game. When Walmart, Target and Toys R Us refuse to sell your game, you are hurting and BMX quickly found that out.

While the experiment had a setback, do not expect this to be the last attempt at putting sex and nudity into video games. Another publisher will try again and once someone is successful with it, look for a bunch of copycats to follow.

**Another Coincidence?**

For the second time, I have seen an idea that I put here in Bit Age Times become a reality. First, I mentioned that I would like to see a game based on The Warriors movie and after six months or so, Rockstar announced that they acquired the rights to do a game on The Warriors and were beginning work on it (it has been announced to be released in 2004-2005).

Then in the past issue of Bit Age Times, which was released in October (it really has been a long time, guess that bi-monthly schedule was shot to heck), I said that I would like to see a Simpsons Grand Theft Auto game. And now I see that they have announced a Simpsons game that is mimicking Grand Theft Auto and is due in September. Coincidence? Most likely, but it still feels good to think otherwise. With that in mind, I bring you to my next article....

**More Game Ideas**

With two of my ideas becoming reality, the desire to pump out more ideas is strong. So here are two more ideas that hopefully will see fruition. If nothing else, the game world is becoming a more diverse place.

**Jurassic Park Survival**

One of the biggest problems with almost all the Jurassic Park games is that they are set on rails. By this I mean that there is a set path to take and there is almost no real exploration. You just move from point to point and kill dinosaurs. This is all fine and dandy but it is a waste of a great license. What I propose is a survival game. Read on and see if you agree with me.

Imagine that you just were stranded on Jurassic Park. Whether it was your boat sinking or a plane crashing, you just ended up on Jurassic Park. You have almost no supplies, no weapons and no way off the island. It is up to you to survive. Unlike the other games, you can explore the entire island. From the jungles teeming with dinosaurs to the wide open plains to the run down remains of Jurassic Park, you can go anywhere and do anything. It is up to you to find shelter, food, weapons and a way to get off the island. This could be accomplished in different ways. You could get off the island by trying to repair the radio and get help. You could go to a beach or mountain and build fires day after day in hopes of attracting attention. You could try to repair a boat and sail away. All the while, you need to kill to eat and not be eaten yourself.

The dinosaurs on the island would have their own AI and would interact with each other. It would be possible to literally sit and watch as a T-Rex would confront a herd of Triceratops. If you wanted to, you could alter the action by shooting at the T-Rex or you could just sit by and watch the action. Maybe if the T-Rex was killed, you could then get some meat from the dead animal. There would be a ton of interactivity and in theory, you could keep playing and playing if you decided to just live on Jurassic Park. Granted, there is a finite amount of ammo on the island and it would get tough to keep finding food, but in theory you could keep going.

So that is my suggestion for the Jurassic Park license. Give the person an entire island to explore. Fill it with dinosaurs that are aware of their surroundings and each other and make it so the person has to learn to survive. Add this with the desire to get off the island, which could be done in numerous ways and I think you have the makings of a winning formula. Add some randomness to the game to keep it fresh and you could have a major hit.

**My Neighborhood**

Sony came up with a game called My Street. The idea behind it was good, but the final execution was not quite so good. Instead of being a fun game, there was a handful of mini games to play and some kids to challenge. That is it. But I can think of a much better game with the same idea. I call my version "My Neighborhood", which would be the sequel to "My Street".

First off, there is a need for more mini games. The seven they offer is hardly enough to keep the game interesting. I propose that there be a good dozen or so mini games with some that take place at certain seasons or at night or day. A few games that I would add are the tried and true fishing along with games like tag, flipping cards, bike races, chasing and catching fireflies, scavenger hunts and more. You could also do things like do odd jobs to raise money to build a better tree house or get more packs of cards to trade and collect. You could do things like open a lemonade stand or walking dogs (which could range from little mean dogs to big dogs that are hard to handle).

Besides mini games, there would be things to collect and trade. Packs of trading cards, comic books and marbles would be among the things you could collect. You could also make buddy lists and try to get as many people as possible on your buddy list. This would get you invited to more parties and stuff and this offers more mini games like piñatas and water balloon toss.

As you play through the game, more areas would unlock. From a basic street you would expand into a park with a lake. Once this is unlocked, you could go and play games in the park, explore in the woods and swim in the lake. Also you could do things like go fishing (trying to catch one of each kind of fish), skip rocks on the lake and take out a paddle boat. Then you could eventually open up a playground and more as you keep playing. Also, more and more kids would come and you could even have some special events like a kid moving away or a block party.

The game would be like a combination of Animal Crossing with My Street and add in some Shenmue. This could make for a very addictive game that offers a ton of gameplay. It could be the kind of game that would appeal to both adults and kids as it would be easy to learn, but would offer so much that it keeps people busy.

**The Other Systems**

In every video game battle, there is usually two dominant systems. From the first race where the Atari 2600 battled the Intellivision to the Playstation battling the Nintendo 64, the race always seems to be a two horse race. About the only real exception is the newest one where all three systems are still in it (granted the Playstation 2 has the race won, but the X-Box and Gamecube are both still doing well). But while the two main systems get most of the press and most of the third party support, they are not the only systems out there. There are always "Other Systems", the ones that have to live off the scraps, in this case the small percentage of gamers who do not get the two popular systems or the people who want to buy multiple systems. With this in mind, let us look at some of the video game races and the other systems that were often overlooked and forgotten.

**Nintendo 8-Bit vs Sega Master System**

While some may argue that this wasn't much of a battle as the Nintendo owned about 95% of the market, it still was a battle. But while these two systems fought it out, there was another system that had to fight for any market share it could get. It was the Atari 7800, a technically sound system, but one that was crippled by a weak lineup of games, especially games that represented cutting edge and what gamers wanted. While Nintendo brought on games like Super Mario Bros, Metroid and Legend of Zelda and Sega gave us Phantasy Star, the lowly Atari 7800 was offering old arcade games like Ms. Pacman and Centipede. Sure these were great versions of classic arcade game, but gamers wanted something new and more complex. Atari just did not have an answer. Sure it later tried with games like Scrapyard Dog and Midnight Mutants, but it did not have the weapons to put up a good fight and was stuck in third place.

**Sega Genesis vs Super Nintendo**

While this battle was much closer (some say it was almost a 50/50 split), there were other systems out there. Granted, almost everyone bought one of these two systems as they offered a ton of great games. Sega had Sonic as well as the best lineup of sports games and Nintendo countered with more Mario (including the excellent Mario RPG, Yoshi's Island and Mario Kart), Zelda and the third parties gave it one of the best selections of RPGs, including the legendary Final Fantasy II and III and Chronotrigger, which is arguably one of the best RPGs of all time.

But there were other systems that were left in the dust. The most prominent was the Turbo Grafx. This system actually battled the Sega Genesis and the Nintendo 8-Bit as it was pretty much dead in the USA by the time the Super Nintendo came out. While it was a very good system and the first to offer CD ROM games, it was a distant third. Part of this was a lack of third party support. Also, the parent company, NEC never seemed to give the US market as much support as it did the Japanese market, which was quite successful.

**Sony Playstation vs Nintendo 64**

This war could almost be divided into two different battles. There was the Sony Playstation vs the Sega Saturn and then it battled the Nintendo 64. It destroyed both as it went on to sell 70 million systems, making it the best selling game system of all time (unless you count handhelds and all the versions of the Gameboy together. Once you add up Gameboy, Gameboy Color and Gameboy Advance, you have the best selling system of all time).

There were a bunch of other systems during this two part war. Many companies tried their hand at winning, but fell short. Some came before and some came after the Playstation, but they all met the same fate. The first of these was the 3DO. This was one of the first CD game systems and it had the record for the highest price for a video game system at launch (it cost \$700.00). Needless to say, the price was a big reason it was unsuccessful. Also, it did not have many must have titles, with only a handful of great games.

Another system to try and make a dent into the industry was the CDi. Short for Compact Disk Interactive, it was possibly the first game system to be sold in infomercials. I can remember those infomercials today and how cheesy they were. One of its big selling points was movies on CD as it boasted a decent selection of movies that you could watch. This was a forerunner to the DVD format of today. But with a weak lineup of games (it can brag to be the only game system to offer Zelda games that was not made by Nintendo as it featured two Legend of Zelda games as well as a Super Mario game), it really had no chance.

The last system to try and battle the big boys was the Atari Jaguar, which almost went down in history as the last American made game system, until the X-Box came along. It was the last system from the once mighty Atari and it was for the most part, a failure. While it offered a technically better system, it did not have the games and many of the games did not take advantage of the power of the system. Games like Cybermorph and Club Drive just looked bad, with the blocky graphics. The fighting games were among the worst ever made and this was at a time when fighting games pushed systems. It also suffered from a lack of advertising, outside of the game industry.

So there is a list of the other game systems. The ones that have been overlooked by most, but still are important part of the history of video games. If you look over these systems you will see patterns emerge. Almost all of them did not have the third party support or the system selling software to be successful. Many of them did not get the advertising they needed to do well, especially television advertising and ads outside of video game magazines.

**Conclusion**

Not a huge issue and it did take a long time, but I finally got one out. Time has not been on my side, so I am happy to get done anything. Hope you enjoyed it and hopefully the next one will be out a bit sooner.

If anyone cares, my latest favorite game is Everblue 2 for the Playstation 2. This game features the wide openness of Grand Theft Auto 3 with scuba diving. It offers a ton of stuff to do and find and for the low price of \$29.99, it is a deal! Plus, it is a non-violent game! It is next to impossible to find a fun game that is non violent and is not Tetris.

[-Tom Zjaba](#)