

Bit Age Times #4

(Covering the Second Generation of Video Games)

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The Age of Mascots

One of the prevalent things during the Bit Age was the mascots. Unlike the classic era, where most of the popular games were arcade ports, the Bit Age was fueled more by original games than arcade games. Not that there weren't a fair share of arcade games that were selling systems (Mortal Kombat selling Genesis, Street Fighter II selling Super Nes, etc...), but it was the age when original games really fueled the fire. This was best demonstrated with the mascots.



You can pretty much trace the mascots back to Mario and the Super Mario series. This series was the one that really caught the public's imagination and gave the Nintendo the market. Not only was Super Mario Bros the pack-in game and a great game to boot, but the sequels set records! Super Mario 3 is the biggest selling video game to date (over 8 million copies sold in the USA alone)! Hard to argue with that! But it didn't stop with the Nintendo, the series was also pivotal in selling the Super Nintendo and the Nintendo 64 systems.

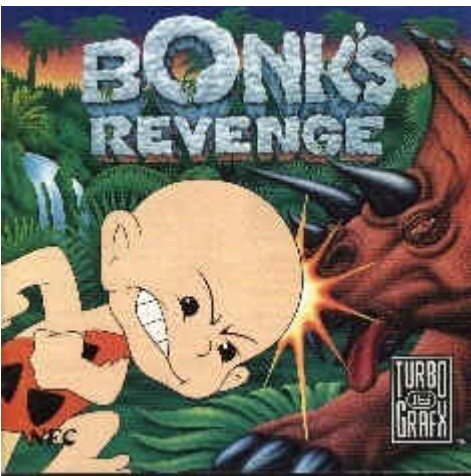
Mario also sold alot of products from comic books to lunch boxes and everything in between. There was even a live action movie based on the video game. This made

Mario one of the most profitable video game characters, not only in games, but also in merchandise. Not bad for a guy who played second fiddle to a gorilla.



But Nintendo wasn't the only one who used a popular mascot to strengthen the sales of their systems. Sonic the Hedgehog also played a key role in the popularity of the Sega Genesis. With his cocky attitude and lightning fast speed, he was an instant success and was followed by numerous sequels. He was so popular that he spawned his own comic book series and cartoon show!

But unlike Mario, Sonic wasn't as pivotal in selling other Sega systems. The lackluster games featuring Sonic did little for the doomed Sega Saturn. While the Sonic game on the Dreamcast may have helped sales, it wasn't the factor behind the success of it. That can be more attributed to Soul Caliber and NFL 2K.



The third major mascot of the Bit Age was a little caveman with a very hard head. While he was the least known of the three, he is probably my favorite. Bonk the caveman was a unique mascot and one that stood out. His attacks were head bonks (hence the name) and he would chew his way up a cliff. He starred in two successful games and there was even a spin-off, Air Zonk, a futuristic Bonk of sorts.

The Turbographx did not have a follow-up series, so Bonk never had a chance to show if he had staying power. He was ported to the Nintendo and the Gameboy, but these systems were inferior to the Turbo Graphx that he originally starred on, so he didn't have the impact. While he did help drive the sales of the Turbo Graphx, the system was a distant third to the Nintendo 8-Bit and the Sega Genesis in sales and never really was given the proper chance.

While mascots really took off during the Bit Age, their presence is still felt today. Crash Bandicoot is a perfect example of a mascot who is helping to sell systems. Then there is Mario's co-star, Donkey Kong who had a series of successful games on the Super Nintendo and now is starring on the Nintendo 64. As you can see, the mascot has become a very vital role in the success of a video game system and with some creativity and a little luck, it can be the difference of whether or not a game system is a big success.

Putting Yourself in the Game

By [Fred Wagaman](#)

One of the things that can make a game an immersive experience is the ability to empathize with the character you are controlling. In the early days, any humanoid would do. It doesn't matter if it was the pilot of a spaceship or good ol' Pitfall Harry himself. Now, don't get me wrong, there are plenty of games that didn't have a person you could relate to that were fun. But there was a bond that was shared when you could.

In the Bit Era, games became a little more personal; especially in the role-playing games. Many games allowed you to name the main character whatever you wanted. No longer did you have to control Perseus or Link. Now you could control someone with your name in an environment that you could only dream of (or experience in a Dungeons and Dragons game). I remember playing Battle of Olympus for the Nintendo. It was one of the early action/role playing games. You could rename the main character as well as the damsel in distress. It didn't seem quite right for "Fred" to be rescuing "Jennie" after defeating Medusa or Socrates or whoever the main boss was in that game. From that point on, I either left the name as the default the game provided, or if I had to give them a name, I went with "Phreade", just to fit in to the fantasy setting. Many role-playing games carry on the tradition of personalizing your game in this way to this day.

Renaming your on screen substitute is OK, but where the fun really begins is placing yourself in the game. And no genre does it better than wrestling.

My first exposure to the Create-a-wrestler mode is in the Saturn classic, Fire Pro Wrestling S: Six Man Scramble. This feature was carried over from Fire Pro's Super Famicom (SNES) games. I think the original idea was to allow you to create wrestlers that weren't included in the game, or new wrestlers that had come into prominence after the game was published. So I was able to create Goldberg, DDP and Stone Cold complete with their signature moves (because nothing is really new in wrestling). But I didn't stop there. I was able to create a slightly overweight, balding figure of a man of average size and stature and called him "Fred". It has as much of a resemblance to me as the preconfigured characters do to their real life counterparts. The difficulty was assigning the 40 or so moves that my avatar could perform using the Japanese move names. (Thanks to everyone that takes the time to translate these things. Without their commitment and access to their work on the net, I would have missed out on this great game.) Of course, the walls of reality break down as my digital twin picks up and body slams Kevin Nash. For fun, I also

allowed a few of my wrestling-fan coworkers to create characters for an over the top, office championship, battle royale.

The ability to create your own character came stateside in WWF Warzone for the Playstation and Nintendo 64. You had less choices when it came to body parts and faces than Fire Pro, but the choices of accessories was greater. I was again able to create a slightly overweight, balding figure of a man of average size and stature and called him "Fred". I even decked him out the same as Fire Pro. I also created a skinny, blonde for my son to use and called him "Max". But Warzone limited you to selecting an entire set of moves to assign to your creation. After completing certain conditions, Warzone gave you something more than Fire Pro; the ability to create female characters. I was able to put my wife in the game for family battle royales now. Far from perfect, Warzone's create a player was a good start.

WCW/NWO Revenge was released for the N64 with a create a character mode. Unfortunately, you could only use their pre-existing wrestlers and could change their clothes. With wrestlers at that time in that organization changing alliances on a weekly basis, it was a nice feature. But I was disappointed that there wasn't a more robust player editor since Revenge came out after Warzone.

WWF Attitude (N64/Playstation) came out in the spring on 1999. It was more of an upgrade to Warzone than a completely new game. The create a player did experience some improvements. Now, instead of just selecting a face, you could build a face with a selection of eyes, noses, etc. And the move editor allowed you to assign a choice of moves to each button combination instead of an entire package. And you had a selection of voices to choose from. Once again, I was again able to create a slightly overweight, balding figure of a man of average size and stature and called him "Fred".

Since Attitude, a couple of new wrestling games have come out. Wrestlemania 2000 (N64) and WCW Mayhem (N64/Playstation). From what I've read, Wrestlemania 2000's Create a Wrestler is a tremendous improvement over other previous US release. Not having used it myself, I'll reserve comment. Mayhem's editor has gotten poor reviews from what I've read. A new Fire Pro game was released for the Playstation in Japan and I've heard good things about its editor.

Some sports games allow you to create a player. Since I'm not a big fan of sports titles, so I'm unfamiliar with their capabilities.

There was a rumor that the Saturn Game Funky Head Boxers was going to be released with the capability to use the Saturn Digital Camera to incorporate your face into the game. That would have been very cool, but I don't believe it ever happened.

But there is supposed to be a game that will let you do what I just described. The often-delayed Perfect Dark for the N64 (coming in April and this time we really mean it !) is reported to allow you to use the Gameboy camera to put your face in the game. The camera will be attached to the N64 controller (through the GB64

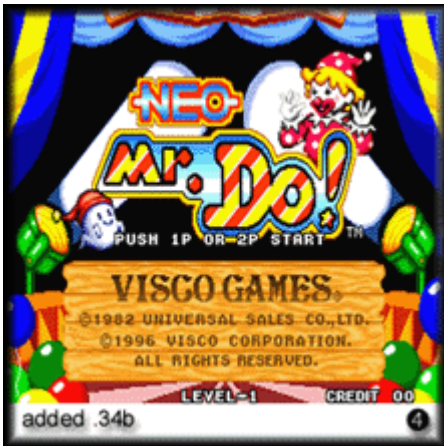
attachment) and you can use your face in multiplayer mode. No longer will you have to remember who's using what character. You'll know who they are, provided you can see the whites of their eyes.

I'd love to see more games use this sort of feature. Imagine the possibilities in role playing or action games. Though it may be a bad idea, given today's climate of sensitivity to violence, to include any capability to include customizable enemies in gun games.

(Fred has been playing games for over 25 years and actively collecting them for over 10. The 2400 + games that he has takes up most of his home office and living room. He lives in Denver, PA with his understanding wife Jennie, his 4 year-old, button-loving son, Max and his newly acquired 4th player, Lynzie. He is a slightly overweight, balding figure of a man of average size and stature and can be reached at fcw3@postoffice.ptd.net

Neo Geo Review

This month, I chose one weird game to review. While it is a sequel to a classic game, it is anything but a normal sequel. So without further adieu, here is my review!



Neo Mr Do

Imagine playing the classic game of Mr. Do. It was a bit strange, with the lead character being a clown who threw energized balls at dinosaurs. Not your normal kind of game. Now imagine that game if it was induced by a hallucinogenic dream. The result would be something like Neo Mr. Do, a very, very strange little game.

While Neo Mr. Do plays very similar to the original Mr. Do, with the same goals (kill all the creatures, clear the board or spell extra) to finish a level, it is anything but Mr. Do. This one looks a whole lot different. In most remakes of classic games, you get a facelift and some new features. But in this one, you get a wild, wacky game that will have you scratching your head and examining your soda to see if someone dropped something into it. It is like an acid trip, ala Mr. Do.

First thing you will notice is that this game is colorful. Painfully colorful. It is very bright and almost makes you want to grab some shades as it borders on blinding. There should be a law against using so much color in a video game. As is the case in many Japanese games, it is very cutesy. You have big, colorful characters who

are all over the place. You may be looking for the CTW logo (for you who are too old to remember, that stands for Children's Television Workshop, the creators of Sesame Street). Each level has a specific theme to it. There are bowling balls and pins in the first level and later levels have you plowing through wood floors and other oddities. The game is very creative in that regard and I give it kudos for that.

The enemy also changes from level to level with toy soldiers, goopy globs and other things coming after you. There are even some odd creatures that pop up like a very mean looking Yeti. Not all of the creatures can be taken out with one shot. Some need you to drop stuff on them or to use one of the special weapons on them.

Speaking of special weapons, there are power-ups in this game, something you thought you would never see in a Mr. Do game. Some make you speed up, some give you rockets to shoot, etc... It really makes a weird game, even weirder. Something wrong with a clown with rockets, fighting letter people. It's like public television gone haywire! But it is good fun, much more fun than those telethons that public television throws. Maybe if they had a militant Bozo the Clown attack Sesame Street, they would get some serious donations. Or maybe not. Anyways, this game is wild, but in a good way. So if you want to play Mr. Do, but are tired of the old version, then give this baby a whirl and see. As the commercial goes, "This isn't your father's Mr. Do".

Top Games of the Bit Age!

If you look around my website, you will see a top 50 most influential games of the Classic Era. Well, I wanted to do another one, but this time dealing with the Bit Age. While the classic era is where gaming began and many of the genres started, it was during the Bit Age that the video game market really expanded and old genres were redone and new ones began! There was a shift from the "see how high a score you can achieve" during the classic age to the introduction of long storylines and developing characters.

Many of the most popular genres got going during this era including the 3D First Person games and the fighting games, two of the most popular genres today. While one could trace these back to classic games like Escape from the Mindmaster and Karateka, it wasn't until the Bit Age that their true potential was realized and they became more than just a novelty.

Other changes became games where 3, 4 or more people could play at the same time! Games like Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and others gave friends a reason to get together and try to defeat a common foe! Plus, games became more financially demanding as you needed to keep pumping in more quarters to be able and keep playing.

Sports games went from two generic teams battling it out, to being able to choose real pro teams and play the role of real athletes! Each year brought new innovations and new players. Also new features like stats, speech and the ability to trade and

draft players came about during this era. Some of the greatest innovations in the sports genre came during the Bit Age.

With this in mind, I decided to try and compile a list of the 50 games that really changed the industry. These were games that not only were popular, but revolutionary! But with so many games to choose from and so many deserving titles, I decided to get some help. First, Fred Wagaman and myself talked and came up with a basic list. It wasn't exactly 50 games, but it was a good start. Now, I am looking for you the readers to help. Look over the initial list and tell me which ones deserve to be there and which don't. Let me know which ones are missing from the list. With your input, I will then compile a full list and print it in the coming issues of Bit Age Times. So think about those games that captured your imagination as a youth. Think of the ones that would still play today. Then send in those lists and together we can compile a great list! I am counting on you!

Nominees for Greatest Bit Age Games

Bomberman

Castlevania Series

Contra Series

Defender of the Crown

Doom/Castle Wolfenstein 3D

Donkey Kong Country Series

Double Dragon

Dungeon Master

Ecco the Dolphin

Final Fantasy

Gauntlet

Gradius series

Herzog Zwei

Joe Montana Football

John Madden Football

Legend of Zelda

Lemmings

Lethal Enforcers

Megaman Series

Metal Gear

Metroid

Military Madness

Mortal Kombat

Night Trap/Sewer Shark

Outrun

Phantasy Star

Pirates

Populous

Punchout

Sim City

Sonic the Hedgehog

Street Fighter II
Super Mario Bros Series
Super Mario Kart
Tecmo Bowl
Tetris
Thunderforce Series
Toe Jam & Earl
Virtua Fighter
Wing Commander

New Year's Resolutions (The Game Edition)

By [Fred Wagaman](#)

This year I resolve.

- . to spend less time collecting, shopping and pricing and more time playing.
- . to find the last 2 Atari 5200 carts I need (Meteorites/Bounty Bob Strikes Back)
- . to find the last Odyssey 2 game I need and not sell my first born to get it. (Power Lords)
- . to find out what I really have and don't have when it comes to boxes and instructions.
- . to have at least one "Game Party Night".
- . to complete at least 6 different games.
- . to build a vertically oriented mini MAME cabinet.
- . to institute a family game (video/board/card) and movie night.
- . to get a PS2 the day it comes out.
- . to upgrade my MAME machine to a more powerful processor.
- . to put together a video game presentation to give to my sister's 5th grade class.
- . to enjoy life more, let little things bother me less and to be more positive.

Happy New Year Gaming to all

Preparing for Y2K.

This newsletter will come out with a whole one day to go before the big Y2K problems. I know that you have seen hundreds of reports on how you should have cash and lots of bottled water and canned food. Well, I am here to give you the important information, not that silly stuff. Sure, you need to eat and drink, but there are more important things in life. So listen up and with my help, we will all get through the crisis without any major meltdowns.

There is alot of talk about there being no electricity. Many people have suggested generators. Bah! They are bulky and very expensive. So you have to go without some television. I know you are worried that means no video games, right? Wrong! Remember those handhelds? So before the big bug hits, collect up your Gameboys, Gamegears, Lynxes, Turbo-Duos or whatever systems you have and test them. So

you know they work, right? Well, run up to the store and stock up on some batteries. I personally suggest the dollar store. You can get Panasonic batteries for a buck a pack! Sure, Energizer or Duracell last longer, but five times longer? I doubt it. So get a big bag full of them. You can also use a bag of batteries as a blackjack in case of looters. A few whacks to the head with the batteries and it will make them think twice.

So now you have your handheld system and batteries. Next thing you do is gather up all the games you have. Yes, even the lame ones. We don't know how long this may last and variety is the spice of life. So get them all together and put them in a box, along with the system and the batteries. Now put this right next to the flashlight, candles and other supplies, so you don't misplace it. Nothing worse than trying to find a box during a blackout. Oh yeah, make sure those batteries are loaded in, so you are not fumbling with it during the crisis. If you have battery packs, then make sure they are loaded up.

So you think you are done. Not quite. Sure you have your games, but you still need a few basics. So head down to the store and grab a few bags of chips and a few fistfuls of beef jerky. This stuff never goes bad! Grab something to drink and keep that nearby. If you live in a colder environment (like myself), make sure you have some extra blankets and a sweatshirt or two. Now, you are ready for the worst! While everyone else is going insane, you can curl up in a nice blanket and enjoy some games and beef jerkey. Have fun!

My New Year's Resolution

Unlike the rest of the world, who are going to resolve to lose weight, make more money or watch less television, I have different resolutions. These are much harder to keep and will stress my spirit to its limits. But I am strong enough to keep them and so help me, I will! So here are the resolutions only a strong willed gamer can keep!

05. To be able and play a Koei simulation game without the aid of an instruction manual!

04. Not gloat at my fellow gamer when I smoke him at a fighting or sports game.

03. To show more patience and understanding and to remember that it is mostly teenagers who are writing the video game magazines of today (or so it seems).

02. Not to buy a game until I actually played it or read enough reviews about it (or to be officially known as the Deathtrap Dungeon rule).

and the top resolution and by far the hardest.....

01. Find something positive to say about Shaq Fu!

Site of the Month

Since we had an article on mascots, I thought I would find a related site to go with it. Well, I found one cool site that deserves some notice! It is called the "Neglected Mario Characters" site and it features all the other characters in the Mario games!

So if you want to learn more about Luigi, Toad, Wario and the dozens of other characters, you can find out here! Lots and lots of info on all the characters!

But there is more than bios of characters. You can read character comics, view deathmatches, create your own Mario characters and more! This site is loaded with all kind of wild stuff! Check it out at the following URL:

<http://www.smbhq.com/users/nc/mario.html>

Conclusion

A century comes to a close and we saw many great advancements in the video game world. But there are still more ahead and the future looks very bright! Now with many of the great Bit Age machines selling for bargain prices, you can enjoy a huge selection of games, for minimum money! As always, keep playing those games and I will see you next century!

[Tom Zjaba](#)