

# Bit Age Times #5

(The Newsletter for the Second Generation!)

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## Top 50 Video Games of the Bit Age

I decided to break this into sections. Each month for the next five months, I will be giving ten of the most influential games of the Bit Age. I decided to start at the bottom and work my way to the top. So this month, we will be giving you #50-#41! This way you have time to give more feedback and we also can keep the suspense going as we get down to the final 10!

The games here are based upon their significance to the video and computer game industry. These are not necessarily the most popular or the most enjoyable games made. While many of the games here are great fun and classics in their own right, there are some that you may argue with, but the importance, whether it be good or bad, that they had on the market cannot be argued. I did lump a few games together, because either they are part of a series or because combined, they had a greater impact than they would have individually. So without any further adieu, here is the first batch!

50. **Championship Manager**-If video and computer games were an American only market, then this game would have little to no importance and probably not make the list. But since the game market is universal, then the impact of this game cannot be overlooked! Championship Manager was one of the first and one of the most successful sports games that went against the grain and offered you the chance to own a sports franchise and manage it. While the Maddens and Triple Plays of the world allowed you to be the player, Championship Manager allowed you to be the owner!

You may not have heard of the original that came out in 1992 on the Atari ST or the sequels that are coming out to this very day, but ask any soccer fan and they probably heard of it. There have been numerous other programs that tried to mimic Championship Manager, both in soccer and also in other sports. Even some of the action orientated series have implemented General Manager modes into their games to cash in on the growing legion of people who want to play sports from a business standpoint.

For a more detailed description of the game, check out my spotlight game of the month, in this issue. There you will find more information about the game.

49. **Wing Commander**-Since early in the days of video games, programmers have tried to simulate space combat. Early games like Star Raiders and Tailgunner were among many that tried to do this. With the popularity of Star Wars, the desire was far greater. Enter Wing Commander! This was one of the most successful of the space combat games and went one step further, by adding a developing storyline to the game. It tried to blend a movie and a video game into one product and to some it succeeded and to others it wasn't even close.

But Wing Commander's importance wasn't so much the game, which spawned numerous sequels, but rather the impact it had on the industry. One of the most legendary things about the Wing Commander games is the budgets they had! Almost each sequel set a new record for the amount of money spent on a game, with the budget being into the millions. This was one of the first series of games that took game development from a small team effort on a fixed budget, to a very big team of programmers, artists, sound and more and expanded the budget of video games to the higher level that is the norm today. It also took the cut scenes to the next level and helped to sell the CD as a medium.

48. **Joe Montana Sports Talk Football**-While the gameplay was typical for the era and even though Joe is a Hall of Fame quarterback, the real reason this game makes the list is because it was the first or one of the first sports games to add commentary. While this may not seem like a big deal to you, it added a whole new dimension of realism to sports games. Not only could you watch the action unfold, but you could also hear it! Almost every sports game since then has adopted this feature and it has become an integral part of sports games.

47. **Lemmings**-While there are many puzzle games out there, Lemming has been one of the most popular and spawned numerous sequels. It showed that great gameplay will sell a game. It featured decent graphics and the sound was nothing spectacular. But the gameplay was so challenging that it made you want to come back again and again. While it is a game like no other, there have been other games that are similar to it. A true original!

46. **Sewer Shark/Night Trap**-I put these two games together for a reason. Neither one is very good and would never make a list on sheer gameplay. But they were the first introduction to CD Rom games to many gamers and showed the potential that the medium had.

Sewer Shark was most gamer's first CD game. Mainly because it was bundled with the Sega CD. It showed many gamers their first glimpse of Full Motion Video, something that is the norm now in games.

While Sewer Shark was the first game many people played, Night Trap was the reason that alot of Sega CDs were sold. A total Full Motion Game was unheard of a few years earlier and while we all realize it is a flawed medium now, back then we all dreamed of actually being part of a movie. Add in the press this game received and how they try to ban

it and you can see how it helped to sell the systems and get the new technology into the hands of many people.

45. **Lethal Enforcers**-Another game that helped push a new medium in video games. This time it was gun games and this was one of the main reasons for the early success of gun games. While the genre has never become as huge as fighting games or racing games, it has remained a steady market with a devoted following. The Virtual Cop series and even the House of the Dead series owe homage to this and some of the other early gun games.

44. **Wolfenstein 3D**-This game was the messenger for 3D games. Sure it was the first one, but it paved the way for the success of Doom and ID in general. Like many groundbreaking games, this one only scratched the surface on the potential of 3D First Person games.

While developing a whole genre was one of the things that Wolfenstein 3D did, it also showed the enormous potential that the shareware market had and helped build the "Try Before You Buy" policy that is so prevalent, even to this day.

43. **Defender of the Crown**-The flagship title from the once popular, Cinemaware, was the start of a meteoric rise to the top and then just as fast crash. The game itself was a basic strategy game that added subgames, cut scenes and other stuff to make it more like a movie. Unlike many war games and other strategy based games of the era, this one had a definite end and a cinematic ending at that. You weren't merely defending your crown as much as you were becoming part of a story. This cinematic approach that Cinemaware took, was later felt in many games including the Wing Commander series and even games as new as Metal Gear Solid.

42. **Punchout**-With its fast action and over the top characters, Punchout was a big hit! It took boxing games and sports games in general and showed that there was a market for sports games that weren't serious and didn't try to be simulations of the real thing. Instead, it took the popular elements of the sport and turbo charged them to make the game more fun. Later games like NBA Jam and High Impact Football were the result of the popularity of the Punchout series.

41. **Dragon Warrior Series**-While there are many great video game series during the Bit Age, the Dragon Warrior series was the doorway for many first time adventurers. Since it was given away free with a subscription to Nintendo Power, a great many copies found their way into gamers hands. This introduction to role playing games, helped pave the way for other series like Final Fantasy and Phantasy Star. While it was far from the first series (the Ultimas, Bard's Tales and others preceded it on the computers), it was one of the first true RGP's on the home consoles. Unlike some of the earlier ones, like the Dungeon & Dragons series on the Intellivision, this one offered you a chance to build your character and to save your game. These were features not normally found in earlier consoles.

While the series did not achieve as much success over here as did other series, it continued to thrive over in Japan where the series is highly regarded. Success aside, it did have four games released here, each one bigger and better than the predecessor. But it

was the first one that really paved the way. Without the ingenious marketing plan on Nintendo's part, who knows if RPGs would be as popular today?

Tune in next month for choices #40-#31. You still have time to send in your suggestions and help to shape this list. I do consider each submission and do tally the votes to help determine inclusion and placement. So let yourself be heard!

## **What Will We Do ?**

By [Fred Wagaman](#)

One of the greatest innovations of the bit age is the capability to stop playing at certain points and save your game. Several different options were offered that allowed this.

First was the password. And the password was good. Write down the secret combination of letters, numbers and symbols. When you want to pick up where you left off, enter that same combination and you were in business. If you had patience to burn, you could try to develop your own passwords for starting the game at higher levels, or with more things, or with different capabilities. Some of the earliest games that used this were on the NES. Megaman and Castlevania come to mind.

Second was the in-system save capability. And it was better. Your game could be saved in an onboard memory area. The Turbograft-16 added this capability with its Turbo Booster Plus and its CD add on. This basically saved your password in memory. One thing you had to remember to do was to turn your system on once and a while. Otherwise the capacitor that kept the save games alive would lose power and poof, there went your games. The Saturn and 3DO also offered on-board memory for game saves. A variation on this is the memory card for the Playstation.

Third was the on cart save. NES, Sega Master, Genesis and Super Nintendo games used this method. This method was great because it made your save games portable. You could play a game on your Nomad while traveling and pick up on it when you got home on your Genesis. These carts basically have a battery on them that keeps your game alive even when it isn't in your system and turned on. This is going to be a problem.

Already, you may have experienced buying an older game that works, but doesn't save your game. I've heard that many people have had problems with the NES Zelda series and the Sega Master Phantasy Star. Both of these games take hours upon hours to play and without a reliable save, you are basically out of luck.

What can be done ? Can the batteries be changed ?

Well, that's the problem isn't it ?

To open up many of the carts, you need either a special screwdriver or make one yourself. Some carts, like the ones for the Genesis, place the screws behind a label. So you might have to destroy the label to even get the darn thing open. Then you have to be able to find the battery and replace it with a similar one. Many of the early carts used a barrel battery (not unlike many of the early PCs) that was soldered right on the board. Maybe you'll be

lucky and it will be a watch or hearing-aid style battery. Then you put the thing all back together and you're in business. Maybe. And if you make the modification before the battery dies, you'll lose any save games that previously existed.

What do you do ?

There is at least one solution for SNES players. It's a device called "Game Saver". This unit plugs into your cartridge slot and has another slot for you to plug your game into. It takes (I believe) "D" size batteries and will save your game at any point. You just pause the game and you're set. One nice thing about this is that it works with any SNES game. Even those without a save feature. It does this by basically making the cart think it hasn't been removed from the machine and that the power is still on. If you remove the cart from the Game Saver, you lose your save, but that is a price you pay. These units have been spotted at Walmart.

So overall, I guess we're left with two choices. Risk damaging our carts or learn to live with starting over. What will you do ?

*(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 acknowledges that things aren't as bad with our carts as it is with the Capcom CPS-II Arcade boards (like X-Men vs. Street Fighter). When their batteries die, you lose the entire game rom. Yikes ! He can be reached at [fcw3@postoffice.ptd.net](mailto:fcw3@postoffice.ptd.net)*



## **Championship Manager, One of the Best Games You Never Played**

I'm still not sure what inspired me to order this game for my Atari ST, so many years ago. While I played soccer some in high school, I wasn't a big fan of it. But I saw an ad in the computer magazine for Championship Manager and something about it caught my eye. So I took a chance on it. I remember getting a check converted to pounds and sending out the order. What I didn't know is how addicting this game would be.

First thing to know about Championship Manager is that it is a soccer simulation (or a Football Simulation if you are on the other side of the pond). You do not play soccer in the way you would with a game like FIFA. Instead, you are the general manager of a team and it is your job to build the best team possible as well as show a profit. This is much easier said than done and this game does a splendid job of creating the illusion that you really do own a team. No other sports game that I have played to this very day has been as enthralling as Championship Manager.

While many games allow you a chance to buy free agents and deal with salary caps and such, no game gave the players a voice. In CM, you cannot just go and grab whatever free agent you want. Depending on the quality of the player, you may be in a bidding war with numerous other clubs for the rights of the player. How bad do you want the player? Not only are you bidding with other teams, but the player himself has to want to play for you. If your club is terrible, the player may choose not to want to play for you and there is nothing you can do. But if the player does want to play for you and you are the top bidder, then you also have to negotiate a contract. How long will it be for and for how much? Sometimes you can get a player to accept less over a longer contract. This makes the game so exciting! You really feel that you are battling it out with other teams and these guys are actual people, instead of just names on a screen.

Buying players isn't the only aspect of the game. You also have to set your lineup. Things get interesting here too. If a player thinks he is a starter and you sit him for too long, he will demand that you release him. When it comes time to renegotiate his contract, you may find that he has no desire to play for you. There are also fines you can levy on a player for various reasons and this too can cause a player to rebel against you. These soccer lads are quite temperamental, so you need to handle them with care.

While dealing with players is quite a job, there are more pressing matters. Your club needs to show improvement and not lose money or after a few years, you can get sacked. One nice feature is that you can apply for a job with another club. So if you think you are headed for a fall, you may want to see what openings are out there.

Another nice feature is the ability to hire and fire coaches and scouts. If the coach is too laid back, dump him and get a more aggressive one. Scouts giving you bad info? Send them packing and bring in a new batch. Nothing like the feeling of power!

The games themselves are like a highlight film. You see some of the best plays of the game and can cheer your team on. At the halftime break, you can make changes. Take out those high scorers and put in the best defensive guys to preserve that lead or vice versa. While you have no control over the team, you cannot help but find yourself cheering.

One of the goals is that you start off in Division 4 with the goal of reaching Division 1. At the end of the season, the top two teams move up and the bottom two teams in a division move down. Besides winning the division and moving up to bigger and better things, there are cup games. These allow you to win different cups and get lots of extra revenue and glory. They also draw larger crowds, so you can pull in more money!

All in all, this is one of the most enjoyable games to ever come out. The best part is that it is still coming out to this day, with a new version, Championship Manager 1999-2000, just out. You may have some trouble finding the game over here in the states, but it is available overseas, if you are willing to wait a bit. An overall great game and one that I cannot recommend enough!

For a good site about Championship Manager, follow this URL. Here they have both links for a fan site and the official site of the programmers, with downloadable demos.  
<http://www.cm3.com/>



## **Dragon Warrior**

by [Doug Saxon](#)

This game, in my humble opinion, is the game that brought RPG's to the home consoles. Some might argue that Zelda, or even games from the classic era like Quest for the Rings or Adventure were the firsts, but these games didn't have the true RPG quality that is found on so many RPG's today. Traits such as naming your character, hit points, experience points, level-advancing, magic spells, and of course the spirit of chance are just some of the many traits that give RPG's that unique quality of gaming. Chance is definitely the one characteristic that got me hooked on these games. In games like Zelda the player must perform an action such as shooting an arrow, or thrusting a sword to defeat an enemy. This kind of action requires timing and coordination. To defeat an enemy in an RPG like Dragon Warrior you need only choose the attack option and chance takes care of the rest.

I remember the excitement of playing RPG's with people like Dungeons & Dragons, where the outcome of battle was determined by the roll of a die. This concept of chance wasn't implemented into any adventure game on the home consoles before Dragon Warrior. I'll never forget the excitement I had when I first brought Dragon Warrior home with me from Toys 'R' Us. Now I was able to capture those D&D moments on TV! Well, today Dragon Warrior is a pretty boring game. I popped it into my NES a year or two ago and didn't get much out of it besides a little bit of nostalgia. The game itself is quite simple. You control one dude through a world filled with peril and treasure. (yes treasure, an RPG dream!)

What's more exciting than getting to the bottom of the deepest, darkest dungeon and after defeating the nastiest red dragon you've ever faced discovering a treasure chest?

Although Dragon Warrior itself is simple it has brought us a whole plethora of RPG's. Games like the Final Fantasy series (how many of those are there now, 8?), 3 more Dragon Warriors, the Phantasy Star series, all can be rooted in Dragon Warrior. Even games from the Ultima series which were popular on home computers weren't ported to the home consoles until after Dragon Warrior. This game set the stage for the popular RPG's we have now. Look at the current Final Fantasy games for example. Although quite advanced relative to Dragon Warrior, you'll find that they all share the same basic characteristics that Dragon Warrior introduced to the home consoles over 10 years ago.

*(Doug Saxon is a long time game fan who has been a regular contributor to both Retrogaming Times and Bit Age Times. He can be reached at DJ7695@aol.com. For a good Dragon Warrior Site, check out the Dragon Warrior Guild at the following URL: <http://www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Dungeon/4083/>)*

## **Prose Story**

In my other video game newsletter, Retrogaming Times, I have done a number of prose stories. These are stories that deals with a certain video game. They have been well received, so I thought that I would try my hand at doing a Bit Age story. So here is my attempt at one. Let me know what you think.



### **I Was a Teenage Altered Beast**

People are always saying that life was better back then. Well, from someone who lived back then, it wasn't. Life was one long series of dangers, life threatening dangers. And this was just to get a date! So I am here to tell you my tale of woe, so you may not fall in this same mode of thinking that we had it easy.

It was sometime BC and I was like most the young lads in my village, heads over heels in love with Penelope. She was the most beautiful woman you ever laid eyes on. She wasn't like the other girls in the vicinity, no she came from a well to do family. She bathed weekly and had all her teeth, a major feat for a person back then. And she had the voice of a siren. To hear her sing was to fall instantly in love. When she sang, even the Satyrs would quit playing their flutes and listen. I tell you, she was one Hades of a woman!

But I was just a lowly stable hand. My job was to clean the stables and keep the horses clean. While it was honest work, I would stink afterwards. Sometimes I would stink so bad, I would give in and even take two baths in a week. But for Penelope, I would take a bath a day, something that no sane person would ever consider. That much bathing would wash away your very being and make you vulnerable to diseases.

Enough about me, lets get back to my favorite subject, Penelope. Her father had decided to wed her by the next harvest and all the eligible bachelors were to bring him gifts to show their true intentions. Back then, a father needed to know that a man could take care of his daughter and the best way to show this was to bring him tribute. Well, I have been scraping up my earnings to buy something expensive to give to the guy. But I know that there is no way I could compete with the other men. So I had to make do with my meager savings and my own skills.

Well, the day came when all the men of the village and neighboring villages came to win her hand. Each of us lined up, dressed in our best tunics and carrying our best tribute. Some brought animals, while others brought fine clothes and others brought baskets full of wine and meats. I brought a bust that was carved out of stone. I spent my money on the tools and did it myself. While I am no expert, I think I did a pretty fine job. Sure, one eye was larger than the other and part of his nose was missing, but it was like looking in a pond and seeing ones reflection, only somewhat distorted. But it was the thought that counted or so I suspect someone said once. I think it was the half crazed scholar, Hallmarkus, who first coined the phrase, but I could be mistaken.

As we waited in line to present our gift, a great and dark cloud swept overhead. Suddenly, there was a flash of lighting that hit the very spot upon which lovely Penelope was standing and instead of killing her, like lightning usually does, it pulled her up to the cloud. A great head appeared. It was the head of Maximillion the Mad, a very powerful, but extremely insane wizard. He laughed and said "Sorry to spoil your fun, but I claim the fair maiden for myself. If any of you brave souls wish to get her back, feel free to try. But know that the path to my lair is filled with immense dangers and great peril. You will surely die a horrible death." He then began to laugh as the head slowly rose up into the cloud. The cloud then rolled away across the sky.

All of the men began to run. No one seemed interested in trying to save the fair maiden from such a powerful foe. Her father stood there with his head in his hands and cried out "Is no one brave enough to save my daughter from such a foe?" As I watched the men, one by one, run off to their homes, I realized that this was my golden opportunity. Sure I would probably die. Sure some evil creature would most likely devour me whole or rip my innards out and feast on them, while I watched in agony. But I had to save Penelope! Not for her father, not for the village, but for me. If I was to ever marry such a gorgeous woman, I knew this was the only way. Sure it was alot to attempt for the love of a woman, but it was that or settle for Ugnalia, the most horrible looking female you ever set eyes upon. She was not only frightfully horrible to gaze upon, but she was also the only other eligible female in our village. So it was almost certain death in a most gruesome way or a life of misery, married to a woman that even the centaurs ran from. And they don't run from much.

Tune in next month for the next chapter of the story.

## Pigskin Progress

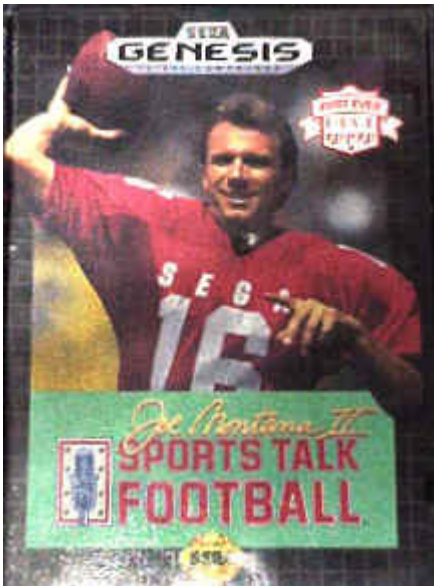
With this newsletter being released on Super Bowl Sunday (Go Rams!), I thought this would be a good time to look at the changes in football games from the classic era to the Bit Age. Sports games in general saw some of the greatest advances of any genre. This was most obvious in the football realm, where innovations were both spectacular and frequent.

During the classic era, most football games consisted of Team A playing Team B. They were usually the same, except for being a different color. One team was usually red and the other blue. They were typically named "Home" and "Visitor." The players were all the same and each game was a season in itself. There was no continuing, unless you kept track of it yourself. Stats were also not kept. Quite simply, football was pretty generic. The Bit Age changed that.



While there were many early football games, like 10 Yard Fight and others, the first significant one was Tecmo Bowl. This game was one of the early ones to let you play with real players! The teams were made up, but the players were named after actual NFL players! While this may seem trivial now, it was a big deal back then. Soon, most of the football games went out and secured the rights to player's names as well as team names.

Another innovation that Tecmo Bowl brought were cut scenes. These little animations added a certain amount of character to the game. Nothing like scoring a touchdown on your buddy and seeing a cool animation to rub it in!



The next big innovation was found on the Sega Genesis. Here you had Sports Talk Football (mentioned in the Top 50 games), which brought commentary to sports games. Now you didn't just see the play unfold, you also heard it. While the early games were limited and after a few games, you heard a lot of repetition, it started the ball rolling for more and more innovations.

While I am unsure which game started the consecutive seasons and keeping track of stats, these were important developments in sports games. Now instead of just playing a game and that being it, you could play out a whole season and see if you could take your team to the Superbowl! Plus, you could see how many stats you could rack up with your favorite player.

One of the biggest reasons there was so much innovation during this era is because two companies were in constant battle to one up the other. Sega with the line of football games and Electronic Arts with the Madden series were constantly trying to win the hearts and dollars of the video game public. This led to every innovation imaginable being added to their game. Soon we saw pictures of players before the games. The ability to trade players soon came. Many more features were also added, like all-time teams, career modes and more. The football games at the end of the bit era were eons ahead of the ones from a few years earlier, in features and realism.

Today, gamers are still reaping the benefit of this great spurt of growth. Not only are modern football games better, but also many of the other sports games have added many of these features. You would be hard pressed to find a sports game that didn't have commentary, continuous seasons or the ability to trade players. These are now expected features that we take for granted. If you don't believe how important they are to a football game, then go back and play one of the early games. After awhile, you will see just how far football games have come!

## **Conclusion**

Hope you enjoyed this larger issue of Bit Age Times! We took a few different directions and changed things around a bit. Look for us to continue and tinker with it, until we find

the exact format we like. Will it be more serious or have a more humorous slant? Only time and your feedback can decide that. But rest assured that it will be out each month and continue to cover the classic systems. So tune in next month on the 29th (a day early, due to being February) to read the next issue of Bit Age Times!

[Tom Zjaba](#)