Bit Age Times

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More Video Game Ideas

I am happy to announce that one of the ideas that I listed in this newsletter, is becoming a reality. There will be a game based on the movie, "The Warriors" done by none other than Rockstar (makers of the Grand Theft Auto series). I could not be more ecstatic! Now I am not taking credit for it, despite writing an article about it in issue #15, back in January 2002. I am sure that Rockstar had the idea, way before I wished for it in print, but if by some miniscule chance, I did help inspire it, all the better. I do not put game ideas here in an attempt to make any money. I just want to see the game ideas happen as I am a big game fan and want to play them. Plain and simple. So feel free to send any of the ideas to any game companies you want. I know that I have sent some of them to Sega and others, of which I get a canned email in response. So with that, here is my next batch of video game ideas, a wish list of sorts.

Grand Theft Simpsons

Since they are so keen on aping every series out there, why not offer one that can really take advantage of the series. Maybe it is me, but Simpson's Skateboarding just sounds dumb. But with Grand Theft Simpsons (it would need a name change, possibly The Simpson's Missions or Simpson's Springfield Adventures). What the game would have is the ability to explore Springfield. You could go around town, visit all the big hangouts and there would be a ton of interactivity. It would be more of a mix of Grand Theft Auto 3 and Shenmue. Like Grand Theft, there would be missions that you would do, of which, they would open up other characters that would later become playable and even more missions. The missions would range from Bart trying to get enough money to buy Radioactive Man #1, to trying to get past Nelson and his bullies without getting beat up. Once you completed enough Bart missions, it would open up Lisa missions, which would later open Marge and Homer, which would open up others.

Also like Grand Theft, there would be side missions that you could complete, which would range from races, to scavenger hunts and other such stuff. There would also be stuff to collect, like Simpson's comics that you could later view the covers. You would also collect video tapes, which you could take back to your house and watch Itchy and Scratchy cartoons. There would be games at the arcade that you could play (based on the ones played on the show). Also, as you meet different characters, they would be included into your Springfield scrapbook. This book would begin as blank pages, but as you met and spoke with different Springfield characters, a page would be filled. It would include a photo, a bio, which would include their first appearance, and their most memorable lines from the show. This way, it would have people want to go around and fill the scrapbook. If the programmers really wanted to get creative, they could do the same thing for episodes. You would collect either tapes or some other item that would unlock pages in a different scrapbook that would have all the episodes. You would not be able to watch the

episode, but you could see a scene from it, as well as a plot synopsis and a list of what characters made guest appearances in the episode.

While it would not be necessary to have a central plot line, it could be done. Either something with Mr. Burns or the Shelbyville residents would work. Of course, there would be smaller plots also, with guest cameos (like Sideshow Bob trying to off Bart or Homer's brother thinking of moving his business to Springfield). So does this not sound alot more interesting than Simpson's Skateboarding?

Sega Arcade Collection

Sega has a long history of great games at the arcade, yet most of them have been forgotten. Sure, we got a few of them emulated in Shenmue, but they really need to make some great collections of games, much like the Namco Museums. They could mix new and old games to make some great packages. Each one could feature about 10 games, with some interviews, pictures of the arcade machine and more. To give you an idea, Sega has released nearly 300 arcade games, yet the majority are not found on consoles or watered down versions are available. Here is a short list of some of the great games you could include:

Classic Games
Zaxxon
Up n Down
Turbo
Tac/Scan
Subroc 3D
Space Tactics
Sinbad
Pengo
Monster Bash
Congo Bongo
Choplifter
Bullfight

Bit Age Games
Afterburner
Alex Kidd Series
Alien Syndrome
Altered Beast
Columns
Fantasy Zone
Golden Axe
Hang On
Outrun
Rail Chase
Shinobi
Space Harrier
Streets of Rage
Super Hang-on
Thunderblade
Virtua Cop
Wonder Boy Series

Modern Games
Brave Firefighters
Emergency Call Ambulance
Funky Head Boxers
House of the Dead
Last Bronx
Jambo Safari
Magical Truck Adventure

Ocean Hunter
Walk the Dog
Wave Runner

This is but a small selection of their games. I did not even take into account all the licensed games they did (which may be tough to get licenses for) like Star Trek, Star Wars and Jurassic Park. They could put four classic games, four Bit Age games and two modern games in each collection. With the wealth of different games, they could really do well and since they already have the games done, it is just a matter of emulating them and converting them over.

The Many Questions of the 2002 Holiday Season

This will be one of the biggest holidays in the history of video games. The market is very strong and is growing fast. All the main game players are very financially sound and the quality and quantity of games is greater than it has ever been. But even with all this optimism, there is alot of questions that will be answered this holiday season. The answers to these questions will go a long way to determine the fate of the game player's in the upcoming year.

The Race for Second Place

While the race for first place is over (Sony has too big a lead to be caught), the very important race for second place is very close and will go a long way to determine who gets the most third party support in the upcoming year. Nintendo owns a small lead in the race, but it has been very close. Granted, this is including all three regions and not just a single one.

The battle comes down to whether or not Nintendo's tried and true franchises will be enough to help it defeat Microsoft with its very strong online plan. Microsoft also needs a few major hits on its system to combat the likes of Mario, Zelda and Metroid. Is there another Halo, waiting to emerge? Only time will tell.

The Online Test - Take Two

The potential and promise of online play has been on gamers minds for years. The Sega Dreamcast has created a stir, but it was hardly a huge success. Granted, it came late in the life cycle of the Dreamcast (mainly due to the very short life cycle of the Dreamcast) and the best online games came after the system was declared dead. But the Dreamcast did show there was an interest in online gaming and now it is up to Sony and Microsoft (and Nintendo to a very small extent - ie: one online game currently in production) to prove that the demand for online games is there and not just a fad, as far as consoles go.

As much as the battle is between the two giants, there is just as big a battle against the uncertainty of whether or not, there is a real market for online gaming. Right now it is all speculative and until there is concrete proof, we can only assume there is a strong demand. But like anything with console games, it will take a few serious hits to build interest in online gaming.

Will Tried and True Be Enough?

The big argument for Nintendo coming in second place in this battle (and some very optimistic people have even said they may overtake Sony, but I think that is a pipe dream at this juncture), has been their very strong stable of games. With Mario, Link, Metroid, Donkey Kong, Star Fox and others to draw from, Nintendo has no shortage of known and proven franchises. So it should easily beat out the X-Box for second place, right? This is not necessarily true. While these franchises have been proven sellers in the past, the question remains, are they still the system sellers they have been in the past?

There are a few factors to keep in mind, when thinking about the Nintendo franchises. While there has been some innovations in the past, these for the most part, do not show alot of innovation. Mario in all his glory, does not show the leap in quality over the Nintendo 64 version, that the aforementioned version had over the Super Nintendo version. Also, the average age of a video game consumer is rising. I read that it was around 28 years old, which is a pretty high age, especially when you consider that most Nintendo games are aimed at a much lower demographic. So we must ask if Mario and company can once again pull off a victory or will the larger adult market of video game players, instead migrate towards the X-Box with its much broader selection of more mature video games.

Can Lightning Strike Twice?

If there is one game this holiday that looks to be a sure thing, it is Grand Theft Auto: Vice City. While it is essentially Grand Theft Auto 3, with a ton of improvements and all new stories, art, music and missions (which in my book,

makes it much more than a mere sequel), it is already creating a very strong buzz. But we must also remember how much buzz there was around State of Emergency and that was nothing short of a disappointment.

While GTA: Vice City should be a big success, one must wonder if it can equal the astonishing sales of GTA 3? With 7 million units sold and more selling daily, it has brought in enormous wealth for Rockstar and turned them into major players (for the people at home doing the math, Rockstar received an estimated $20.00 per game, once you minus the $15.00 licensing fee to Sony and $15.00 discount that allows retailers to make some profit. When you times that by 7 million units, you come up with a return of $140 million dollars, on a game that maybe cost $20 million to make (most likely it was alot less than this, but with the Hollywood voice actors and having the write and compose their own songs, the costs could get up there). As you can see, they have every incentive to repeat this and by throwing millions at getting Ray Liotta to voice the main character, as well as licensing 90 real songs from the 1980's and all the other stuff they did, will go a long way to insure another major payday). Will the game be unique enough to convince gamers to spend another $50.00? Will it be good enough to bring Rockstar another incredible payday? My guess is yes, it should not only meet, but possibly exceed the sales of the original. But only time will tell and the early word on the game will go a long way towards determining its success (though having 4 million presold will do alot for guaranteeing success).

The Future of Mature Video Games

One thing that Grand Theft Auto 3 did last year was show there was a market for more mature video games. Add in some of the other recently popular mature games like Soldier of Fortune and Max Payne and you see a trend. Now that publishers have shown that you can make a very violent game and it will sell and you can keep it on the shelves, they are going to push the envelope a little more this year. This time it is sex that will be the focus. From BMX XXX with nudity to Dead or Alive Beach Volleyball with well endowed women in very small outfits, going into some very suggestive positions, the market will now test how far they can go.

The whole industry will be watching to see what kind of backlash and more importantly, what kind of sales these titles have. If they are popular and do not get banned, look for plenty of imitators in the coming year.

The Early Days of Nintendo Football

One of the fun things about the Nintendo is that you were able to watch genres grow. You were able to see the growth from the infancy of a genre to the maturation. One area that this was very evident was in football games. The growth from one NES football game to the next was amazing. I will look at a few of the early ones and the growth from one title to another, to give you a better idea of what I am talking about.

10 Yard Fight - The North/South Runner

One of the early games on the NES was the ever popular 10 Yard Fight. The game was football in its infancy, only a few steps above the earlier Atari games. The game gave you the choice of either running the ball or throwing it. The football characters ran much like the soldiers in Frontline, with that not very realistic movement. There were no plays to call, just hike the ball and either run for daylight or throw to an open receiver. Very plain and very simplistic.

On defense, you had a choice of two players to control. Defense pretty much dealt with trying to stop the guy from running past you, not an easy task. There was no blitzing or special defenses, one plan fit all. Once again, very plain and very simplistic.

As with earlier games, you did not choose teams. You had a team and the computer or opponent had a team. All the players were generic as was the team. It was the Home versus the Visitors and that was about it.

The game involved moving from north to south. This made the field look long, but very narrow. There was an almost claustrophobic feeling to it as you fell very closed in. As with the rest of the game, there was one field. It did offer different skill levels, which added to the game. From High School to College to Pro's, there was a skill level for all players. This was a nice feature.

Tecmo Bowl, A Major Leap Forward

The second game we are going to look at is Tecmo Bowl. This game offered a ton more compared to 10 Yard Fight. It really is amazing how far the industry came in such a short period of time. Besides better graphics, this game offered real teams with real players. While there was only eight to choose from, you could play with such notable players as Dan Marino as he threw to Duper and Clayton, switch handoffs between Bo Jackson and Marcus Allen or even play as the Cleveland Browns (which was a big deal to me as I was from Cleveland).

While having real players and rosters was enough to warrant purchasing this game, there was also more plays. Granted there was only four offensive and four defensive plays, but considering 10 Yard Fight had run and pass as your options, it was a big improvement. Then add in the animations, the much better left to right scrolling playfield and even stats for your players and you see why this game was all the rage!

Soon it would be eclipsed as games began to offer all the teams and larger playbooks, but during that period when Tecmo Bowl ruled, it was pure enjoyment for football fans. We never had it that good and had no idea that it was only the start of a revolution.

Buried in Games

by Sarah Szefer

Help! I'm buried under all my games!

I own several consoles, from the Atari 2600 to the Playstation, from the NES and Sega Master System to the GameCube. All in all, I have seven different consoles, plus three handheld systems and a Mac computer.

My problem is simple: I have so many games that I don't know which one to play. Should I concentrate on finishing the Playstation-era Final Fantasy games, or should I go back and master Ms. Pac-Man on the Atari? If I were to play all my games to completion (or oblivion, for those earlier never-ending games), I'd be hooked on my TV or computer for the next couple of years. It's obviously not an option when I have to make a living and pay the bills.

So, aside from not buying any more games until I'm done with the ones I have (this is impossible, as Nintendo prepares to launch its powerhouse of GameCube games), what can I do to give a fair chance to all my games? There is a simple solution that my mother uses for her videotapes: write down the names of all the games (yes, even Pac-Man 2600!) on pieces of paper, and put them into a small box. Drawing the name of the game to be played insures that none of my games end up being ignored forever.

Sarah is a 26-year-old Montreal-based translator. This former videogame columnist for Adam Magazine is addicted to Tony Hawk 2 and is fascinated by Eugene Jarvis' games. She can be reached at s_szefer@yahoo.com

X-Box 2 - The Speculation

Word from Microsoft is that the X-Box 2 will be made available to the public in 2006. The word from Sony is that the Playstation 3 will be available to the public in 2005. Sounds like Deja Vu, doesn't it. That is if you believe what they are saying. Personally, I do not believe it. There is no way that Microsoft will give Sony a one year head start again. I personally see the X-Box 2 shipping in the fall of 2004, most likely early November. The worst case scenario is November of 2005. You may think I am crazy, but I have good reasons for this. Read on and find out why and more specifically what I think the X-Box 2 will feature.

First and foremost, the X-Box is the one system that is closest to the next generation of any of the systems on the market today. If there is one thing you cannot dispute about the X-Box, it is the foreword thinking of Microsoft, specifically the design team. The X-Box is the one system that is full of features that will be considered staples in the next video game battle. From the HDTV compatibility to the incredible sound system to the hard drive to the built-in broadband, the X-Box is designed with the future in mind. Problem is that most of its best features have little meaning to the average gamer. The number of people with a HDTV, 5:1 sound system and broadband connection are quite small. But that is what you would need to fully appreciate the X-Box. While this group is a very small minority of consumers today, their numbers will grow tremendously by the time the next video game battle begins. With that in mind, the X-Box 2 does not have to do much to its current system to get it ready. It already has these important features for the future.

While there are more than one reason for the huge success of the Playstation 2 (currently there are over 40 million shipped and that number is rising), one big reason is the early start it had on its competitors. With the Dreamcast on its last legs, the Playstation 2 enjoyed a year with no real competition. This gave it ample time to build its user base and guarantee the third party support it needed to remain on top. This will be on Microsoft's mind and I can guarantee you that they will not allow this to happen again.

The second reason that I believe that the X-Box will come out first is that by 2004, game programmers are going to be looking for a new platform to develop for. They will have grown tired of the Playstation 2 and will not want to bother with the limited space of the Gamecube's mini discs. And unless the X-Box has a miraculous holiday season, the third party support will be waning quickly for the X-Box. While the publishing companies have the ultimate decision on what system gets the games (they are the ones that pay the bills), the programmers are the ones that want to work with the cutting edge system and once the dev kits for the X-Box 2 begin to ship, look for the interest to grow. A good example of this is the very good support the Dreamcast had at launch. Much of this is due to the fact that it was the new system.

Now it is time to speculate on what the X-Box 2 will offer. Remember that this and the whole article are nothing but speculation. So take it with a grain of salt. But here is what I expect the X-Box 2 to feature:

Faster Processor-The current X-Box has a 733 MHZ processor, which is quite formidable. But expect the X-Box 2 to have at least double that. A 1.5 Gig computer is a low estimate. A 2.0 Gig computer is a much more realistic number and one that is higher than that is not out of reach. One thing to remember is that a 2.0 gig processor is already obsolete now and it is only 2002 (they are up to around 2.8 gig if I am correct). You must remember that it will be a custom chip, so it will be set up to be faster and better than a typical off the shelf processor.

More Memory-One of the best features of the X-Box is the 64 meg of unified memory. Programmers love the flexibility to use the memory as they see fit. This is another number that will at least double. 128 meg of unified memory would be quite powerful, but expect the number to be closer to 256 meg of unified memory, which would have programmers drooling.

Larger Hard Drive-Another great innovation of the X-Box 2 and one that will be copied by other systems is the hard drive. While the 8 gig one that is currently available is ample room, look for that number to shoot up. A very low estimate would be a 50 gig hard drive. A much more realistic estimate would be a 100 gig hard drive, with faster accessing speed. The hard drive will also be implemented more in the next generation, now that programmers are getting used to having it.

Backwards Compatibility-One of the big selling points for the Playstation 2 was the backwards compatibility with the original Playstation. This gave it a huge library from day one. Look for the X-Box to follow suit and have the X-Box 2 play the original X-Box games. This will give it a solid starting library and added value to cost conscious consumers.

X-Box Live-This time around, the X-Box Live will be up and running. They will not need to wait for it and current owners of the X-Box will be able to keep their accounts.

Exclusive Content-Now that Microsoft has bought up Rare, look for better first party support in the upcoming battle. The purchase of Rare may be a little too late to really help the X-Box as you will not be seeing any X-Box software until the middle of 2003 or later. But they will be very instrumental in the next battle. Also look for Microsoft to buy

at least one, if not a few other publishers. Rumors are already swirling about Capcom being bought by Microsoft. While it is just a rumor now, so was Microsoft buying Rare.

As I said before, this is all pure speculation. But what I will bank on is Microsoft bringing the X-Box 2 out before or at the same time as the Playstation 3. Anything less than this would be suicide on their part. Now that they have released one system with some success, the second time will be easier for them. They have a better idea on what worked and what didn't. They know what mistakes to avoid. Look for them to make a very serious bid at being the top game system in the next battle.

One last item about Microsoft and the X-Box 2 before I end this article. If they really want to position themselves to be the system of choice in the next battle, they need to get some serious content, some exclusive content. The best way to do this is to go to the source. A very fast way for Microsoft to give themselves a ton of exclusive properties, especially properties that are proven is to buy the following two companies. Why many of you are thinking Sega or a game company, I have two that affect video games, but do not make games. These two can be purchased for a fair amount less than it would take to but a video game company that would offer as much. Those two companies are Wizards of the Coast and Marvel Entertainment.

Imagine the X-Box 2 with the exclusives to not only Magic: The Gathering, but all the Dungeons & Dragons based video games. Baldur's Gate would be X-Box exclusive, Icewind Dale would be X-Box exclusive as would Magic: The Gathering. Now imagine all three games running on X-Box Live and you see a very tempting idea. Now go one step further. While Sony would have Everquest, imagine an online RPG called Dungeons and Dragons Online. Which one would the average consumer notice? Sure, Everquest is a very popular franchise, but Dungeons and Dragons is an institution. It is a part of popular culture. Now I know that you will say that Wizards of the Coast are owned by Hasbro. While that is true, I am sure a very significant offer can get them to sell it to Microsoft. Even though Microsoft could afford to purchase Hasbro as a whole company, it would probably not be in their best interests. It would be much more affordable and much easier to just buy Wizards of the Coast.

While the Wizards of the Coast would do wonders for Microsoft, imagine having the entire Marvel Universe and all 4,000 heroes and villains at your disposal. All of them being exclusive to your console. All Spiderman, X-Men, Fantastic Four, Incredible Hulk, Punisher, Blade, Captain America, Daredevil and the rest of the Marvel clan, all having their games exclusive to your console. Talk about a major trump card. With the new Incredible Hulk, X-Men, Daredevil and Spiderman movies coming, it will be even more important. Then think of what online possibilities you can have with these characters (I know there is a company that bought the rights for online games based on them, but Microsoft could just buy this company or have their lawyers work out a buyout of the contract). The possibilities are endless and the sales potential are enormous.

Sites of the Month

Bub and Bob
There are two little characters in the Bit Age that have combined for two of the most addictive games ever. These guys are the dinos from Bubble Bobble and Puzzle Bobble, two games that have sucked away more hours of my time than I ever care to admit. Here is a whole website dedicated to Bubble Bobble and all the sequels. With tons of pictures, sounds and more, this game will have everything any Bubble Bobble fan could want! Check it out!

http://www.bubandbob.com/

Tecmo Adventure Team
Since we were talking about Tecmo Bowl in this issue, I thought you may enjoy a site full of information on this still popular video game. Rosters, wallpaper and more can be found on this game. If you are a fan of the game or just want a walk down memory lane, check out this cool site!

http://www.geocities.com/tecmoadventureteam/index.html

Conclusion

It has been a long time between issues, but I did finally manage to finish it. Hope you enjoy it and maybe we can get more contributors in the future. I get alot of emails from people who want to write, but somewhere between asking and doing it, they decide against it. I would tell you when the next issue will be out, but I have no idea. They are

solely written as inspiration hits me. When I get enough articles to release them, out the door it goes. So enjoy them as they come. Until next time, may all three game systems do well and may you find time for all your games.

-Tom Zjaba

(Wishing that the Dreamcast had just one more year. Imagine the lineup they could have had the last year - Half-Life, Shenmue 2, Headhunter, Rez, Super Monkey Ball, Virtua Fighter 4, Bass Fishing Duel and more. Dare to dream).