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In case you have not heard the news, Retrogaming Times Monthly has been bought out by The Retro Junkies (www.theretrojunkies.com). What this means is that RTM will no longer be published on its own website, but appear as part of The Retro Junkies on their website under a new section called GameMags. This in turn will create one of the largest classic gaming communities on-line!

The main reason for the sale of RTM was because I no longer have the time to edit and put together each issue, so I was actively searching for someone to take over publishing RTM, and since The Retro Junkies are the biggest new name in town, I thought their offer for RTM would be best to accept for not just the staff of the magazine, but also the readers as well. With this new venture, they will be able to provide an all-in-one classic gaming center where you can go to read magazines (RTM will be one of hopefully more on their site in the future), listen to a podcast, or watch a video. The possibilities are endless and I expect RTM to grow as part of the Retro Junkies.

Now you are probably wondering where this leaves you the reader. Well, this website will still remain, as an archive of the back issues of RTM. However, new issues will be posted once a month (on the 1st) on The Retro Junkies website. So you will still get your monthly fix of RTM on the 1st of each month, just at a different domain. This means that the last issue of RTM on this site will be January or February. The exact month is not certain, but it will be one of those months. So come back here to this website for at least the January issue and I'll have more info then as to where the February issue will be.

See you next month with more details!



It's no secret, the holidays are different for all of us, especially as gamers, and while most of us never grow up and enjoy the holidays for the fun of ripping open presents like we're still 7 years old and waiting for that one game or system we always wanted, I have seemingly made this transition from child to adult, not completely, but at least somewhat as it relates to the balance of getting and giving gifts. I've honestly come to a point in my life that giving things to people is even more important to me than getting a gift, and I think that's a healthy place to be. This is obviously most important to me with the kids in my life. I don't have kids of my own yet, but I'm blessed with several nieces and nephews, as well as friends who have kids of their own, and I always look to this time for year to really show them, along with my friends, how much they mean to me. Believe it or not, the following two stories don't have anything to do with Christmas (well the one doesn't), but they are, without question, two times in my life where I was glad to pass along my love of gaming to two people in my life that mean so much to me, and they are both great illustrations of living your life with no regrets. Some people would shy away from the money I spent or the time devoted, but not me. It was worth it.

The first of these stories involves my fiancée's nephew Tommy. Tommy is a great kid, very athletic, a great heart, and a pretty funny guy too. He's in his senior year of high school right now, and we couldn't be more proud of him. Well, prior to all of this, he was toiling away with his Xbox 360 (that I was never a big fan of) and I could tell he was beginning to get a big jealous of me and his friends who had PS3 systems. He would come over our apartment, play a game, and say over and over again "I wish I had one of these." We obviously wanted to help him out, but at the time the money just wasn't there. So we sat and really thought how we could make it work, and then something truly magical happened.

I'm not here to get brownie points, but there are many great qualities and skills that Kathy, my fiancée is blessed with. She's an amazingly kind and compassionate person, she makes some amazing items through her crochet business, and she's probably one of the most caring people in the medical field I know. She also happens to be one of those people who seemingly wins every radio contest in our area. She always seems to be that right caller, or gets her name picked at random, whatever, so when our local radio stations began putting PS3 systems in their weekly contests, we called every time. At first we were always off, by just a second or two, but finally it was ours, we had a slim PS3 with enough room for Tommy to play whatever game he wanted. To say

our usually calm and collected teenager was psyched for this was an understatement, as the set came with the latest Call Of Duty title that year. He still plays his system proudly.

The second story involves my best friend, Paul Van Hook. Some of you may see some of his posts on my Facebook page. We've done radio shows together in the past, and still hope for one day to bring it back. We went to college together, I was his best man at his wedding, and when I finally get married, that's the same spot he'll be filling for me. Paul, God bless him, really loves sneakers and cars, and he'll spend whatever it takes to have great looking cars for car shows or some of the best sneakers out there, but he isn't always willing to spend as much on video games, and I can't blame him. He works as a disc jockey as well as a marketing director for a publication in our area devoted to homeschooling, so he's quite the busy guy. However, he always enjoys coming over to our apartment to play the latest video games. My decision to purchase him a PS3 was an easy one. The process for doing it took a bit more time. In 2010, Paul and I were best friends for a whole decade, and we really wanted to do something special to celebrate that. It took the magic of a refund check from the college I was going to at the time, but I managed to snag him a PS3 and some racing games for him to enjoy. We were celebrating our friendship at the apartment when it was time to exchange gifts. This is actually a moment where I felt bad, because I could tell Paul felt bad he was only handing me what turned out to be an awesome Hanson CD (don't judge) and he was getting this large package. It got better though when he opened it. He stared quizzically at the PS3 box and, as friends who play pranks on one another tend to do, questioned me.

"So, you gave me your PS3 box?"

I smiled and shook my head. "No, that's yours, my friend."



I was all like "MmmBop!" and he was all like "ZOMG, IT'S A PS3, AHHHHHHH!!!"

His jaw almost hit the floor. He couldn't stop thanking me, feeling so bad all he got me was a card and a CD. I'm the kind of person who doesn't care about the size or monetary worth of a gift. All that matters is the thought that was put into it.

Gift giving feels my heart with joy, it truly does, and I look forward to doing it again this year.



For the first time in a long time, I struggled to find ideas for articles here at RTM. Oh sure, I had those already established review articles, and I even had the uncanny idea of creating a catalog of ideas for those looking to buy retro for loved ones during the holidays. But I didn't have that one article that was different from all the rest. My mind, you could say, has been quite dull around the time of writing this, and I think one of the main reasons was I was very much against writing about the subject matter of this article. Then, of course, the more I thought about it, the more I realized how disrespectful it would be not to write about this special person I'm going to talk about today. However, before I do, there's the need for proper backstory.

I've been fortunate enough to be blessed with the love of someone truly amazing. Her name is Kathy, and we've been together for over 5 years now. I'm someone who, despite my outward and zany nature, deals a lot with depression and anxiety, and she's helped me conquer so much of that during our relationship. At the same time, I've helped her climb some mountains of her own.

Kathy was adopted at an early age, and while not having the best relationship with the woman who is technically her mother, she always wondered what her father was like. Little did she know he was seeking her out, and not long after we started dating, they would be reunited, building a bond that is probably one of the strongest ones I've ever seen in my life. Bob, her father, is a great man who I respect so much. He's lived an interesting and challenging life, and along with meeting Bob, I met Robin, his wife, both of whom are the nicest, warmest and compassionate people I've ever known. At one point they actually lived here in PA, but would soon return to Alabama, where they spent several years, after the passing of Bob's father. We would continue to keep in touch with them.

Robin, the focus of this story, shared a common bond with me, a love of video games. Robin has a huge box of boxed NES and SNES titles, as well as retro systems of her own. I would joke that when we stayed at their apartment I would sneak off with it in the night. Robin's infectious laughter and warm smile always melted me, and she always believed in me with everything I ever wanted to do, from running a business, to working full time and getting my life back together as far as my mental state is concerned. I would sit and talk with her for days at a time about everything from video games to the businesses she ran during her lifetime.



I'll miss you, Robin. One of the nicest people I've ever known.

On November 8th, 2013, while we were at the first day of the Christmas bazaar where I sold video games, Robin passed away, suddenly. She was only 50 years old. I tear up simply writing that. As of writing this, my fiancée, Kathy, is in Alabama, helping her father through this difficult time of losing someone he's known almost 30 years. Bob told me not to be surprised to find a certain huge box in the mail sometime soon. I told him it wasn't necessary, he told me he has no interest in them. All I could muster to say was that I'd be honored, and I won't be selling one single item out of this box. Robin always loved the color purple and ladybugs. Every day I see something purple, and their home, in Alabama, has now seemingly become a haven for ladybugs. I'm not a super religious person, but I do believe there are signs everywhere we look.

I will always have fond memories of Robin, from us calling her to tell her we found a copy of Adventures In The Magic Kingdom, one of her favorite games, or how I scoured the area trying to find her a copy of Krusty's Super Fun House. Then there's the time her and Bob found a random DS just lying on the side of the road, still working properly. Robin made me figurines of Mario, Luigi, and Yoshi that still sit on my gaming shelf at home, although I did bring them with me to the last two days of the Christmas bazaar, and kids did look at them fondly.

What's my point to all of this? I'm not sure really. I guess a part of it is to always tell the people you love that you love them, but also to hang on tight to those people who share common interests with you. You never know how long they'll be here for, and at the end of the day, all you have is the memories. Thankfully, a lot of my best memories of Robin involve her smile, her stories, and our love of video games.

Thanks, Robin.



...Of Sorts

In both my duties as a writer here for RTM as well as my role as a small business owner selling retro video games, I'm asked quite a bit during this time of year by those who have a loved one who enjoys the classics just what they should get them as that special Christmas gift to place under the tree. Now obviously the following is not a comprehensive guide and definitely far from complete, but I did want to give people, perhaps those who have children who are getting into retro gaming, or perhaps someone reading this who has a significant other who enjoys gaming, but they themselves have no clue where to start.

I took 5 systems, the Atari 2600 NES, SNES, Genesis, and N64 and selected 10 games from each system's library that I hope at least give people a place to start. Now I know to most of us many of these games will seem like no brainers, but keep in mind, perhaps even those who have vast knowledge of these system libraries have purchased so much, they don't know where to go next. All I know is, a retro gamer of any age would love to find any of these games under their Christmas tree. Let's go!

Atari 2600

Pitfall

Always a great place to start when helping a retro gamer start their Atari 2600 collection, or even starting your very own. This is the game so many people remember on the system, with the system's unofficial mascot of Pitfall Harry. Despite having a very basic premise, which is the norm for most Atari 2600 titles, it doesn't change the fact that this is a very challenging game that keeps you coming back for more.

Pitfall II

Voted the very best Atari 2600 title in Retro Gamer's Atari Book, the sequel to this classic took everything we knew and loved about the original and completely expanded upon it to the fullest extent. With some great tunes for an Atari 2600 title, the exclusion of a timed run, and with the ability to give Pitfall Harry a chance to swim, Pitfall II is a bit harder to find than the original because it's very coveted by collectors. While I personally don't see it as the best game on the system, I can understand why many others would feel that way.

Frogger

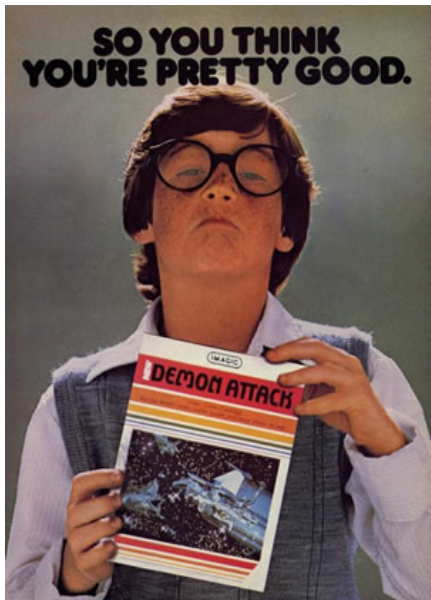
Probably the most adored game for the 2600, and quite popular, with more than one version. Whichever one you choose, you won't be disappointed. There's something totally addictive and yet somewhat malicious about guiding a frog through traffic, then onto logs and being ok with the fact he could get squashed. Frogger was one of the first games that took a simple premise and really focused in on it to the fullest extent. This is the game most retro gamers who are looking to get back into collecting crave for the system. For many of them it was the first Atari 2600 title they ever played.

Space Invaders

While not as great as the true arcade classic, still a stellar port just the same. Space Invaders is one of those games that you honestly feel at first glance that you'd get bored with rather quickly, and yet that's how fast it grows on you. This is another one of those games fans of the system remember playing during childhood, and it is definitely one of the more popular titles for the system.

Demon Attack

I threw this game onto the list for personal preference only, but also to let people know this is one of the true hidden gems for the Atari 2600. While closely related to the game Phoenix, is definitely it's own distinct title. You play as a laser cannon of sorts taking down these flying demons that come out to a loud whooshing sound, each level having demons of increasing difficulty. Definitely a fun game I encourage anyone to try out.



80's Rob Luther says it's time to get busy...playing Demon Attack.

Kaboom

In my opinion, the best game for the Atari 2600 that utilizes the paddle controllers. You are using what look to be kiddie pools of water to put out bombs tossed at increasing speeds and varied directions by the one known as The Mad Bomber. In truth one would think if you lose a pool because a bomb exploded that you didn't catch, the game should get easier. Wrong. The game just keeps getting harder, but it's addictively fun.



Dropping bombs in kiddie pools since the 1980s.

H.E.R.O.

While not a game I've played personally, like some other games on other gaming systems, was overlooked because of when it was released, in this case, during the big video game market crash in the early 1980s. While the premise may seem silly to some, a game that really packs a punch and is worth tracking down. Voted one of the best games for the system, and offering more variety than most 2600 titles.

Missile Command

Still many years later, one of, if not my favorite 2600 title. Again, while not a complete port of the arcade classic, definitely very close, and still a great game in it's own right. There's something addicting and fun about blowing up lines of missiles as they try to attack your base, each level increasing in difficulty. One of the more underrated games for the system.

River Raid

Just for the ambition alone that went into this game it is worth picking up for any diehard 2600 fan. What a lot of folks don't realize about this game as well as many other titles for this system is that there is indeed an aspect of strategy to it. Do you shoot down the fuel tanks, or do you use them to fuel your plane? Do you skip a fuel tank to blast down more enemies hoping another one comes along before you run out? River Raid is a great game and a terrific addition to any 2600 collection.

Galaxian

Like the similar game Galaga, Galaxian took something along the lines of Space Invaders and amped it up by 11. While not a true arcade accurate port, still a nice try by programmers with the 2600's limited capabilities. If you're a fan of games like these, shooting enemies out of the sky, then you need to get a copy of this game ASAP.

NES

Mega Man 2

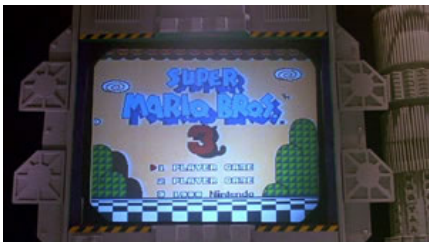
Like a lot of sequels of earlier games, much better than the original, and seemingly always given a lot of praise as the best of the NES series of Mega Man titles, and I'd have to agree. Mega Man 2 gives younger games a look at a character they might not know about, giving them a better appreciation of the Blue Bomber, as well as satisfying those hardcore retro gamers who grew up loving Mega Man. The best part is, while it is expensive, it isn't as elusive as the later NES Mega Man titles, or anywhere near as pricey as they are.

Castlevania III:Dracula's Curse

While the original Castlevania was an excellent title, this was truly a greatest hits of everything we loved about the series as a whole, and certainly got a lot of people off the hate train once the second Castlevania title came about. It can be a little pricey, but it is one of those games that if you grew up with it or know someone who loves games like it, is certainly worth the price. The fact you get to use characters other than a Belmont is really what made this game unique.

Super Mario Bros. 3

One of the most popular games on the NES, and has a legacy that transcends time, as there are still t-shirts and posters with this bright, colorful cartridge art adorned on it (I'd know, I have the t-shirt) but the game itself isn't that shabby either, which is kind of understatement. If you have kids, you can explain to them that this was the game seemingly every kid on the block wanted, and when we got a sneak peek of it in The Wizard, we wanted it even more. The most complete Mario title of the NES series hands down.



Man, that was one LONG Nintendo commercial.

The Legend Of Zelda

While I'll always prefer the sequel (Yeah, I know I'm weird) no true NES collection is complete without this staple of the era. Between the shiny gold cartridge, the focus on exploring, or those characters that would go on to become icons in the video game universe, this is a game I think many gamers looking to start collecting for the NES would love to see under their tree this Christmas. This is another series that's great to show off to kids too, because many have played the more recent Zelda titles, but it's almost nice to show the younger generation a gaming franchise's more humble beginnings.

Maniac Mansion

Quirky, funny, in some ways downright bizarre, almost like The Rocky Horror Picture Show of retro gaming, Maniac Mansion is a game that needs to be experienced with an open mind in order to fully understand it and to be entertained by it. With talking tentacles that want to start a rock band, a nurse that throws you in a dungeon, and the ability to nuke a hamster in the microwave, this isn't your ordinary point and click adventure by any stretch of the imagination. I consider it a hidden gem for the NES system, and if you're buying a game for a retro gamer that seemingly has everything, this might be the right avenue to go.

Ninja Gaiden II

While the original was great in it's on right, there's something far more polished about the sequel. Between those classic cut scenes, awesome bosses, and a terrific soundtrack, this game has something for everyone, and if you have a gamer who loves his ninja games, this is a must for that kind of collector.

Double Dragon

To many retro gaming "traditionalists" this game really doesn't deserve to be on this list, as the arcade classic is far better in every way, but for a lot of people this was their introduction to Double Dragon, and I still feel it deserves a spot in any NES collector's stash. Nothing truly exemplifies the brawler genre of gaming quite like Double Dragon, and this is still a decent port, when it really comes right down to it.

Contra

As a retro gaming business owner, I can tell you, it seems the prices of this title just keep going up and up, which one would consider interesting since this game is notorious for it's one hit kills and without the Konami Code seemingly unbeatable, but it's those things, along with the core gameplay of running and gunning that make this title so endearing even so many years later. Perfect for a retro gamer, old or new, that wants a challenge.

Adventure Island

One of the first games I ever played for the NES, and I really feel is an unappreciated title for the system. I feel it's appealing to kids and older gamers, just, whatever you do, watch out for that creepy eggplant guy who tries to kill you. No, seriously.

Paperboy

Has really developed an almost cult status over the years, and really is a game that people either really like or really can't stand, there doesn't seem to be a middle ground anywhere. Deceptively challenging and a lot of fun to play through, Paperboy is a game that makes a perfect Christmas gift for any retro gamer and fan of the NES.

SNES

Earthbound

It's no secret, I am a HUGE fan of this game, as evident by my review of it last issue, so I feel the game belongs on any gamer's list for the holidays, and this is especially true if you or the one you are buying games for this holiday season is a huge RPG fan. However, expect this to really rack up your bill on eBay, or wherever you choose to buy it. If you can find a copy for less than \$100 consider yourself lucky.



Chillin at the corner of Jabroni Drive and Know Your Role Avenue.

Donkey Kong Country

While many prefer the sequel, the original game is still very beloved among gamers. You can't go wrong with games by Rare, and they were at their peak during the SNES era. This game has a great soundtrack, memorable characters, and graphics that are still timeless to this day. Most importantly, in many cases, it's quite affordable.

NBA Jam: Tournament Edition

While the original NBA Jam was great, I feel this sequel really fine tuned things, and what is great about games like this and NFL Blitz is that you don't have to be a fan of the sport to really enjoy the game. Sure, it helps, but it isn't required as I loved the game but I am not a huge fan of basketball. Affordable, and still a blast to play all these years later.

TMNT IV: Turtles In Time

Obviously if your special someone this holiday season grew up a Ninja Turtles fan (and in fact is STILL a fan) then this is definitely a game you want to hunt down and get for them if you can. One of, if not the best TMNT game that isn't in an arcade cabinet, even though it originated there. It can get pricey in some instances, but it's one of those games that's really worth the money.

Chrono Trigger

Another stellar RPG for the SNES, and quite expensive as well. It really was a game truly ahead of it's time, and while it's sad there hasn't been a new installment made in the series, it hasn't stopped people for hunting this game down and paying top dollar for it. Any true RPG fan who also collects SNES titles would love to have this on their Christmas list. Timeless in many ways, Chrono Trigger continues to excite, and never disappoints.

Killer Instinct

With the debut of Xbox One fast approaching, a lot of people are looking forward to the next installment in this franchise's storied history. I'm not frankly, as I'd still rather play the original. Killer Instinct is a game that, if given enough time and attention by a gamer, can quickly become one of that gamer's most cherished fighting games. Very original for it's time, another true classic by Rare, and that sweet jet black cartridge stands out on any shelf.

Final Fantasy III

One last RPG I feel anyone who both loves the genre and the SNES should have. Yes, future Final Fantasy entries would be better, but this is still among the best in the long-standing series, with a lot of great tunes, story elements, and characters to keep gamers busy for a long, long time. Plus it's an RPG with an elusive ninja, and who wouldn't want to play a game like that?

Mario Kart

With the formula for this franchise just gets better with each passing game, it's always nice to show that favorite gamer of yours this holiday season where it all began. Still a blast to play, especially with a friend, Mario Kart is a game that, I honestly feel a lot of people thought wouldn't work, yet has excelled in a way few could have ever imagined. Still a hot ticket item for collectors too.



This is what happens when Mario eats too much pasta with red crushed pepper. It gets real.

Mega Man X

Redefining a classic in every sense of the word, THEN going on to becoming a classic in it's own right, that's what Mega Man X is. Highly coveted by collectors and still highly regarded as one of the best SNES games on the console, if you're holiday gamer loves their Mega Man games, then you really should get them a copy of this title if it's in the cards for you.

Sega Genesis

Sonic The Hedgehog 2

Certainly most Genesis fans would tell you to introduce a new collector or younger gamer to the original Sonic game, and while there's certainly truth to that, the sequel, I feel, is a step above the original, while still retaining a lot of the features that made the original so appealing. With some of the best tunes of the series, along with the debut of Tails, I feel this is just as equally appropriate a starting point for that holiday gamer looking to get into the Genesis.

Beyond Oasis

Deceptively appealing, challenging enough to keep you interested, and with a story that's fun to play through, Beyond Oasis is one of those games that works well for that Genesis gamer who is looking for something new this holiday season. Solving the game's puzzles can be frustrating at times, but with persistence comes success. This is a hidden gem for the system, I'd say.

Golden Axe

One of the most recognizable Genesis games, even by those who aren't huge fans of the system, and for good reason, there's a lot to love. Golden Axe combines the love nerds and geeks have of fantasy fiction and a gamer's love of brawler genre gaming, and what you're left with is still a pretty great game even after all these years. Certainly they got better as time went on, but you can never go wrong with the original.

Toejam and Earl

While I personally don't get the fascination with this game, I would be remiss if I didn't mention the cult classic of the Genesis era, Toejam and Earl. It's kind of like Napoleon Dynamite as it takes you awhile to figure it if there's actually a point to it, but by the time you do, you're laughing at all the little jokes scattered throughout. Monumental in some ways (I suppose) if your gamer likes their fun with a nice dash of humor added in, AND they have a love of the Genesis, there are few games better.



It's ok guys, Black Friday shoppers scare me too.

Streets Of Rage 2

Recently awarded by readers of Retro Gamer magazine as the best Genesis title in the system's lifespan, and while other games may fall flat when having such high marks from gamers, Streets Of Rage 2 lives up to that and then some I'd say, and I'm not even a big Genesis gamer, as many of you know. Like many game sequels of the same era, it exceeds expectations left from the original game. Not that expensive and fairly easy to obtain, a solid brawler title with those awesome techno beats.

Mutant League Football

If there's one thing I can certainly credit the Genesis for having is a lot of those games that became cult classics over the years, and I feel this is a prime example of that. Taking that all too familiar Madden formula from the time period and really twisting it in a way that makes it fun and certainly unique this is becoming a game that's harder to find than it used to be, and for good reason, as it seems everyone wants it. Rumor has it a follow up to it is in the works, which has only increased the value of this game. The best games are those who make a genre that bores a lot of people fun to play, so even if your gamer doesn't like football titles, they'll enjoy this interesting twist on the original sport.

Comix Zone

Largely overlooked at first because of how late in the Genesis lifespan the game was released, Comix Zone has a love/hate relationship with most gamers, but I think in a way that's what makes it so appealing. Difficult, insanely challenging at times, yet with an art style and music that made it essentially ahead of it's time in a lot of respects. Comix Zone is a game for your Genesis gamer that seemingly has it all and wants to conquer a new challenge. It's definitely not a game for your novice gamer.

Earthworm Jim

Have that gamer in your life who just loves the real quirky stuff? Well look no further than Earthworm Jim, a nice action platform title with a great sense of humor, distinct art style, and some great music to go along with it. When this game debuted, there truly wasn't anything like it, and I think that's what makes it so adored by so many diehard Genesis gamers.



Yes sir, that's a cow that needs to be launched, pronto.

Mortal Kombat

What it lacks in sound it makes up for in controversy. Mortal Kombat had the government and parents freaking out back in the early 1990s, with its violence, which looks tame compared to today's standards, most notably the use of blood. Nintendo caved into the demands of parents by omitting the blood from it's arcade port of the title, but the folks at Sega stuck to their guns and created the far more popular version of the two. A must for any Genesis owner who loves fighting games.

Shining Force II

While the original and prequel were great titles, I still feel this is the best Shining Force title on the Genesis. With memorable characters, catchy tunes, and the use of turn base strategies to go along with your standard RPG fare, this was a very different style for the genre at the time, and it really paid off. Obviously if your gamer is a Shining Force fan, you know they would love to get a hold of this. The Genesis was really light on quality RPGs, and in my opinion, this was the cream of the crop.

N64

Mario Kart 64

The premiere racing title on the system, really took things that one extra step further in the franchise, and is still a favorite among college students who love their retro gaming. Any racing genre lover needs to have this under their Christmas tree this holiday season. It's also quite popular of just general fans of everything Mario related.

Mario 64

Speaking of Mario related, it's no secret that some folks had their doubts whether Nintendo could pull off a 3D style Mario game, and yet it was done, seemingly so effortlessly that a lot of critics were stunned into silence. Mario 64 is a game that really expanded upon what we already knew about the Mario franchise and put it in a world we wanted to be a part of. It was one of the most expansive worlds Mario was ever cast in, and also became more challenging than another other Mario title up to that point. I know as a video game business owner, a lot of customers look to couple this with their N64 purchase.

Conker's Bad Fur Day

Just reading the title of this game gives me a chuckle, and brings me back to my college days, where a bunch of friends and I would sit and play the multiplayer portion of this game over and over again, laughing our butts off every time. Notorious for it's raunchy and very tongue and cheek sense of humor, this is a game that has become almost like the Holy Grail for collectors. The lowest I've seen this game go for online is \$60 and that was in some poor shape. To get one in at least fair condition, you're talking at least \$80, if not more, and they are becoming a bit harder to find. Ahead of it's time (it had singing..well, you know) and with a multiplayer mode that just has to be experienced, if you can somehow snag a copy of this game for your N64 collector, expect nothing but the biggest smile their face can muster.



Because really, what more is there to say?

Goldeneye 007

Long praised as one of the best first person shooters of all time, a lot of gamers were pleasantly surprised by this game when it came out. While some may say it hasn't aged well, I still feel it packs enough of a punch to keep your retro gamer busy for many, many hours. Still one of the most recognizable games for the system.

Zelda: Ocarina Of Time

Taking nothing away from Majora's Mask, which is an honorable mention on this list, Ocarina Of Time is one of those games that whether you're a Zelda fan or not, chances are you played at least once on the N64. While I haven't played through the game much myself, I can still remember my roommate in college playing it for hours on end, and I'd just watch him in awe of what I was looking at. Ocarina Of Time is a game that really changed the way people looked at Zelda games. They became less of a game and more of an experience, and that continues to this day. Any Zelda fan needs this in their collection, and while a bit pricey for some, isn't nearly as high as Majora's Mask, and is more readily available.



Great tune, Link, but is that green dot above your head telling you "in the name of love?" "calibrate and listen?" or "Hammer Time?"

Banjo-Kazooie

Enough has been said during this article about how truly great Rare was at making quality games. This game is another prime example of that. This game takes you on an adventure, with some really great characters and a stellar soundtrack. Inexpensive most of the time, and offers something for every kind of gamer, always a nice game to pick up during the holidays for your favorite N64 loving gamer.

WCW/NWO Revenge

With more depth than expected for an N64 wrestling title, this game was released during the height of the wrestling boom in the 1990s and features some of the best wrestlers of that era, along with some truly bizarre characters as well, but it all fit together in a piece little package to make something totally unique and special for any fan of wrestling games during that time. With responsive controls, a nice selection of game options, and with the largest roster of character at that point, it's no wonder this is usually found in any wrestling fan's gaming collection. If you're special someone this holiday season fits that category, then this is a game you should hunt down for them.

Diddy Kong Racing

Probably one of the more underrated games on the N64, and one of the more underrated racers of all time. Diddy Kong Racing, in some ways, was a nice alternative to the other racers on the system, and some gamers still prefer it to Mario Kart 64, which says a lot about the game. It certainly deserves a place on any gamer's shelf this holiday season, that's for sure.

Super Smash Bros.

When this game came out, jaws dropped, pins were heard, the winds of change came, and I think a few babies (and grown men) wept. You really knew Nintendo was onto something big when this game came out, and the franchise has only become that much better with each passing installment. Any loyal Nintendo consumer who grew up with the characters in this game would love, and let me stress LOVE whoever was awesome enough to pick up this title for them as a Christmas gift.

Pokemon Stadium

While I personally will never get the obsession with Pokemon (sorry guys, and my cousin Chris) this game is something that is enjoyable even for those not familiar with the vast amount of characters or the ins and outs of the cartoons. It also used the Transfer Pak, which allowed gamers to bring in those same Pokemon from their handheld titles to the big arena of Pokemon Stadium. It was a first for it's time, and if your gamer loves Pokemon AND the N64, you can't go wrong with this classic.

Well, there you have it, a solid selection of games to choose from, but don't just stop at what I've listed here, continue to search, ask questions, and find out just what that special someone in your life is looking for in the realm of retro gaming. In the end, you're not just giving a gift, but giving back a memory that person had from long ago.

Merry Christmas!



Generations Of Gaming

As the archetypal systems of the new 8th Generation arrive on the scene, and the earlier 8th Gen systems are at precipice moments of success, failure, or permanent sustainable mediocrity, I felt it high time to offer up something on the various generations of gaming that we have seen, from the very first to the one now dawning.

While certainly not intended to be a comprehensive list of systems, here's a breakdown of all the major, and many of the minor systems that occupied the various epochs of gaming that we've all been able to experience, and enjoy, and that have all been instrumental to shaping the generations that came afterwards.

- 1st Gen: Pong, and Clones
- 2nd Gen (A): Atari 2600, Intellivision, Odyssey 2, Channel F, etc
- 2nd Gen (B): Atari 5200, Colecovision, TI99/4a, Vic 20, etc
- 3rd Gen: NES, Mastersystem, Atari 7800, Commodore 64, etc
- 4th Gen: SNES, Genesis, TG16, Neo Geo AES/CD, Amiga, etc
- 5th Gen: PS1, Saturn, N64, 3DO, Jaguar, etc
- 6th Gen: Dreamcast, PS2, XB, GameCube
- 7th Gen: Wii, 360, PS3
- 8th Gen: WiiU, Ouya, PS4, XB1

Methodology on assigning debatable systems to which generation I did:

There's a lot of debate on which generations certain systems fall into. For instance, one of the hosts of a certain video games podcast that I respect, admire, enjoy, and had the privilege of catching dinner with one time believes that 3DO and Jaguar would belong in 4th Generation, rather than 5th, like I've placed them. He goes by release date in dealing with the questionable systems.

And it seems to me that if one goes by date of release, they would land smack dab in the middle, with maybe a soft nudge towards 4th. However, there's more ways to view this than just by a crass release date system. I think there are three systems of measure that you can use: 1) release date, 2) power (which I'll elaborate on below), and 3) purpose (which I'll also elaborate on), and if you use any one of these alone, you'll end up with odd outliers, and different outliers in each standard. I think the best way to get the fewest outliers, and the most consistent, and holistic standard of measure would be to hold all three of these units in tension, and determine whether there's more merit for downclassing them, or upclassing them.

For instance, if a system came out early, but spec'd like the later generation, and was used more like the later generation, then I'd call it an early example of the later generation. If, on the other hand, it came out early, spec'd like the later generation, but was used like the early generation, then I would call it an exceptionally powerful example of the earlier generation. Now, I don't want to use generic universal weighting for all of these measures, but want instead to weigh by the contextual significance of the given variable. In other words, if two aspects faintly point towards later generation, while one aspect screams early generation, then I'd probably consider it early generation. Also, an admitted bias on my part: When in doubt, and all else is equal, I tend to default to classifying a system as later generation, rather than earlier generation. In fact, I'm struggling to think of a single debated system that I classified as the earlier of its two possible generations.

An elaboration on power: Obviously, this includes raw spec sheet data, but it also includes how the system was received at release (what impact did it have), since we're operating using the 3DO and Jaguar as examples, release date would indicate 4th Gen, spec sheets would indicate 5th Generation. Impact was such that when the system came out, they felt truly next gen. They felt revolutionary hardware-wise. By comparison, when the Saturn and PS1 came out, they didn't feel hardware revolutionary compared to the 3DO and Jaguar. Instead, they felt like a tweaking and perfecting of the formula, and an integration of such technologies into the mainstream (where they had been fringe.) To me, this would indicate 5th Gen as well, as the origin of the hot new thing was with the 3DO, and not the Saturn.

An elaboration on purpose: How was the system chiefly used? Was it chiefly used to do basically what the former generation was doing, or was it chiefly used to do basically what the upcoming generation was doing? In other words, did the 3DO and Jaguar game libraries more closely resemble the SNES and Genesis' game libraries, or more closely resemble the Saturn and PS1, not just in terms of common titles, but more so, common formats, and common elements. For instance, 2D side-scrollers existed on PS1 and Saturn, but were more prevalent on the 4th. Also, Polygonal gaming had a marginal existence in 4th gen, as did FMV via the Sega CD and TG16CD, but both were more hallmark of 5th Gen. By this standard, 3DO is strongly 5th gen, and Jaguar probably faintly leans that way too. Also, when doing either one, was the experience you received from it more like the experiences of the later gen, or the earlier gen. In other words, when 3DO and Jaguar did 2D side scrollers, were they more like the side scrollers of the SNES or the PS1. This generally plays also into the power side of things, but not 100% so. Anyway, in this case, I'd say both lean towards the 5th Gen, and the 3DO quite a bit so.

That's how I reconcile the questionable systems. A couple other examples: Atari 7800: Date = 3rd Gen, Power = 3rd Gen, Purpose = 2nd Gen (while it did have detailed, NES caliber games, and certainly had the hardware ability to do so, most of them were still one-room-planet games such as Centipede, Joust, and Food Fight, often with plain black backgrounds a la the Atari 2600). Result = 3rd Gen. Wii: Date = 7th Gen, Power = 6th Gen, Purpose = 7th Gen (with the robust system menu, and full online suite. You interact with it like you interact with the 7th Gen systems, not the 6th). Result = 7th Gen

Anyway, for the purposes of this article, these will be the definitions of what is x gen, and what is y gen. In the comments section, feel free to voice disagreements, but be prepared to make a case for your objection based on the rubric above...or, I suppose, demonstrate for us why the rubric doesn't work. :-)

Now, to my thoughts on the given generations (in Generation order, not preference order):

1st Gen

Foundational



This is the Generation that started it all. Games....on your TV? Is that like the Gong Show? We owe a tremendous debt to the 1st Gen for were it not for them, nobody would've had a desire to innovate, and create cartridges for games which birthed the 2nd Generation, which gave countless people (myself included) their first real taste of the awesomeness that depopulated the playground, and led to a sharp uptick in hurled erasers in the classroom followed by "Jimmy! Pay attention!"...."Yes, Mrs. Jones." But there really was so little uniqueness in this generation, and so little depth. Also, you bought the system and that was it. Few to none of these systems had expansion cartridges to allow new games (and I don't think any had game carts in the way that we understand them today) And, it wouldn't be til 2nd Gen that consoles would have AI (or even a microprocessor, for that matter), so there was no such thing as playing against the computer. Also I know that modern gens are panned for an abundance of sports, racing, and FPS games, but never was genre spread lower than it was in the 1st Gen. I deeply respect the 1st Gen, and am indebted to it (and, I'd love to get my hands on an actual Atari Pong machine!) But in terms of simple enjoyment...well, it was fun, but it definitely felt neither deep, nor wide.

2nd Gen



Revolution: Carts, Microprocessors, and the AI they bring – the ability to play against the computer.

Evolution: Not a ton of raw graphical improvement.

This is where it all started for me. This is where you started to see more genres, and more diverse gaming experiences. This is where the systems ceased being a self-contained entertainment packages, and rather, the platforms upon which countless entertainment selections could be made for individual purchase. As such, this is also where which system you had really mattering really started. I definitely have quite a lot of love for Gen 2. Gen 2 is also neat for being the only Gen to be subdivided

into two sub-generations (2nd A - Atari 2600, Intellivision, etc / 2nd B - Atari 5200, Colecovision etc). If you ask me, 2B should've been 3, 3 should've been 4, and so on and so forth....oh well. While the Atari 2600, Odyssey 2, or Channel F didn't make much of an improvement in raw graphics over the previous gen, they blew open wide the doors to a whole new way to game (kinda like Wii vs Game Cube). Graphics improved a bit on the Intellivision, and by the time 2B rolled around, they improved even more. You saw very few games with vertical scrolling, and I'm not sure if there were any games with horizontal scrolling, but you had games that could take up multiple screens and rooms, and even in the "One Room Planet" games, you had a unique and innovative twist whenever you put in a different cartridge. However, the games were still radically simple and plain compared to 3rd gen, let alone the ones after that.

3rd Gen



Revolution: Tile based graphics engines that allowed easy horizontal scrolling, big detailed character sprites that actually looked like sprites, rather than fonts, detailed background, and foreground graphics. Full soundtracks with multi-channel sound systems becomes the norm. It was pretty rare in 2B, and exceedingly rare in 2A.

For many of us, it was 3rd, and not 2nd that represented our first exposure to games (it was 2nd gen for me). Also, 3rd gen came post crash as a revival of the market, primarily by Japanese companies, with big franchises and games that seemed at the time to be of sheerly epic scale! It was also at this time that video game music became a real entity. Though these systems weren't the first to have sound hardware up to the task, they were the first where cartridge size and/or system memory would really allow it. While most of the most timeless and enduring game franchises were either born in 2nd, 3rd, or 4th gen, I do believe 3rd was the most important of the three in this regard.

4th Gen



Revolution: Console Wars becoming a serious thing.

Evolution: Significant advancement to graphics and sound – including the mainstreaming of advanced forms of digital sound production, such as FM, Wavetable, and sampling.

For most of us, 4th Gen was the defining generation for gaming, with fans lining up on either side of the SuperNES / Genesis debate. The 4th gen changed the way we look at competing consoles in a generation. While no generation has been as hotly debated as 4th, on the one hand, and while it's not as if there was no such thing as fanboyism, or console debates before this on the other, the 4th gen sort of set the tone of battling for your system. In one sense, the 4th gen was just the 3rd gen again, only better looking and sounding, but there were new things. There were new franchises, and several new technologies, such as Mode 7 or SuperFX, but for the most part, it was evolutionary – though highly evolved. However, it was also in this generation where 2D was really "perfected". And this is why I love it so much. It was also in this generation, with the Neo Geo where we first saw true arcade perfection in the home. It wouldn't be til the 6th generation, and the Dreamcast where we'd see arcade perfection again, and even that had load time, which the AES did not.

5th Gen



Revolution: The mainstreaming of "3D" polygonal gaming, the mainstreaming of CD-Rom gaming.

Evolution: A moderating and improving of FMV over 4th gen CD-Rom games.

This generation, in my mind, is "the second 2nd gen" - utterly paradigmatic. I definitely feel that 1st, 2nd, and 5th are the three most revolutionary generations of gaming. Now gaming was "3D". The rogue "2D" side-scroller game was generally really good as well (and looked absolutely gorgeous to "16-bit" eyes), but they were so fringe. You also had these amazing arcade ports...not arcade perfect...but amazing. Things like Daytona, Ridge Racer, the Tekken, and Virtua Fighters, and everything else. Then, we had N64, which unwisely hung onto the cartridge format, but still did pretty well with them. N64 also played into the "SGI" craze with much smoother (though smudgier) graphics, though it still fell well short of the expectations that they had set regarding its graphical capabilities. The point is, this was the new frontier...all over again, like the 2nd Gen was, and perhaps to a lesser extreme, the 3rd Gen. However, just like with the 2nd Gen, with the 3rd and 4th gen doing it better, so did 6th and 7th gen radically improve upon the formula, not just the graphics, but the bigger, tighter games, with better voice acting (since it wasn't enough anymore to simply have voice acting, but it had to be at least decent to pacify us.) And as such, I think the 5th gen has aged more poorly than any other generation. 4th gen doesn't look old to me...but 5th gen does...I don't know how much sense that makes...but it's true.

6th Gen



Revolution: The mainlining of better-than-arcade performance, precursors to the dawning of mainlined on-line gaming.

Evolution: Significant graphics improvement. A general transition from musical to ambient sound scores.

6th Gen vs 5th Gen, I think was more akin to 4th Gen vs 3rd Gen than 3rd Gen vs 2nd Gen. Oh, there were things that changed, such as largely moving away from mostly "video gamey" music compositions to mostly ambience (often orchestral), much larger scale worlds, and stories, but otherwise, it's just more of the same, only better - much better graphics, realistic, non-blocky character models, virtually no pixellated/smeary textures, better lighting and shading, and virtually no pop-up (we also began to see things like bump mapping). There is also much less cheesiness to the 6th gen than the 5th gen, though admittedly, there was a lot less cheesiness with the 5th Gen than there was with 4th gen CD-Rom. Jaguar and 3DO had a lot of cheese, I suppose, but by the time the PS1/Sat rolled out, our standards had sufficiently raised that we wouldn't put up with it at that level anymore (and even moreso, the 6th gen). There was limited online stuff for Dreamcast, PS2, and I believe, even the GameCube, but these didn't do much to improve upon the very fringe online dabbling which happened in the 4th gen with x-band, and the Sega Channel. However, X Box live did make some meaningful inroads in introducing online console gaming to the masses. I still wouldn't call it "mainstream", but it definitely set the stage for it. The 6th gen lacked that magical newness of the 5th, but apparently in a contest between fresh innovation, and perfecting old innovation, I prefer the latter (though in general, I prefer the musical approach to the 5th gen)

7th Gen



Revolution: Fully integrated on-line gaming – Standard, HD Final resolutions on two of the three systems (though a lot of the games were upscaled to HD from something below HD, but above SD). Robust system menus that are immersive, integral, and as different from each other as they can be. Tons of DLC, and achievements! Motion capture prominence (via Kinect, PS Move, and above all, the Wiimote).

Evolution: Dramatic improvements to lighting, shading and textures (though it took a little while to really grow into the enhanced texture capabilities), deeper, more expansive games. Wireless controllers are standard, not niche.

As the technology has increased, and games have been able to fine tune in this way, so have the standards we set before games in terms of polish, fit and finish, musical finesse, and voice acting, script-writing, etc. For better and/or worse, many games have almost become interactive blockbuster films rather than simple diversions...at least in terms of "campaign", or "story" mode. For the simple diversions, we often look instead to the other major change to how we game in the 7th, present before, but never prominent – online "multiplayer" gaming. What once many of us were suspicious of, wireless controllers, for the need to frequently have to replace batteries, or otherwise charge them, to fears of latency, or interference, we have now embraced wholesale, and wonder how we ever gamed "tethered" to the console like we were. Also, game machines, again, for better and/or for worse, are no longer devices where we insert the game, fire it up, and away we go. But instead, they are more like computers with their own OS (or at least, with their own GUI), and those GUIs, from the sharp, polished, option excessive PS3 menu system, to the bold, semi-microsoft-standard no frills 360 menu, to the cutesy, squeaky-clean (and even "sterile-in-the-best-possible-way") Wii system, game systems are no longer just game systems, but game centric multimedia entertainment centers (especially when you add in things like Netflix, and Pandora, etc.)

8th Gen



Revolution: Touch screens/track pads in the controller...and who knows what else! The day finally arriving where "Indie" consoles are truly viable.

Evolution: A continued radical improvement in lighting, shading, textures, poly counts, physics...you name it! Native HD res now standard in games (rather than sub-HD upconverted to HD for final resolution). Increases in multimedia integration, and indie and/or retro gaming, continued improvements in motion-capture technology.

Well folks, the 8th Gen has arrived. But it's still so new we're not 100% sure what to expect from it. So, going by anticipation, rather than concrete knowledge, I expect the 8th Gen to be to 7th more what 4th was to third, or 6th was to 5th, rather than what 7th was to 6th, or what 3rd was to 2nd. By this, I mean a lot of evolutionary improvements upon what ruled the day in 7th. I don't expect a ton of earth shattering paradigm shifts. However there is one significant shift: despite the fact that it's not being very successful right now, and its long term future is indeed in question, the very fact that we even have an Ouya on the market, which so undercuts the big boys in price, but manages to perform reasonably well against them in hardware, especially in such a small form-factor is a major shift. Even if the Ouya doesn't make it, it only paves the way for other attempts, which most likely will eventually succeed. Whatever the case, Ouya is reality, where the aborted 6th Gen "Indrema" was just that...a dream. It will be interesting to see what the 8th Gen has in store for us. It could go all wrong, heck, it could even be the final generation of game consoles as we know them (at least in part to things like Ouya), or, it could just be a fairly boring generation, with not much changing except a more polished veneer, and bigger worlds. Or, it could be everything 7 did right done even better, with more to-be-determined innovations in the wings. We'll just have to see, but I remain largely optimistic (and that optimism is reflected in how I will rank this largely unknown generation against the now well-known 7th gen.)

Speaking of which, it's time to move to the question of how I would "rank" the generations personally [read: subjectively] from favorite to least favorite: I'm solid on my list with one exception. There's a certain generation that I'm not sure whether I would rank

3rd or 5th. It's kind of a "love vs the idea of being in love" sort of thing, except it's not a matter of whether or not I love it, but rather a question of just how deeply I do.

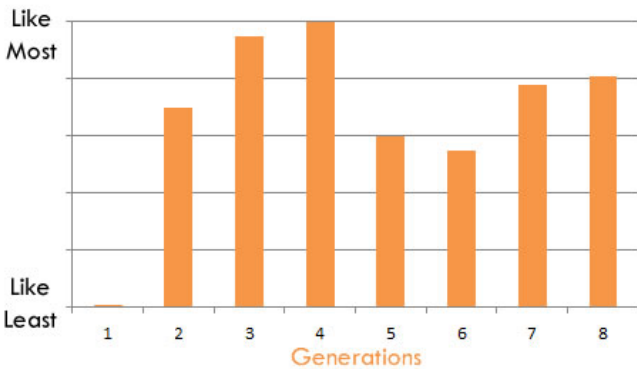
So my list:.....	
Is it...	..or is it
1. 4th	1. 4th
2. 3rd	2. 3rd
3. 2nd	3. 8th
4. 8th	4. 7th
5. 7th	5. 2nd
6. 6th	6. 6th
7. 5th	7. 5th
8. 1st	8. 1st

They're the same except for what I do with 2nd Gen.

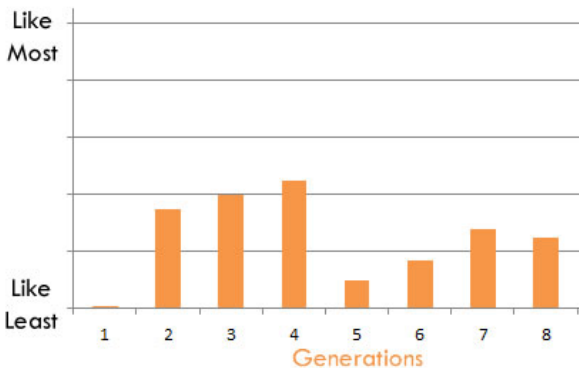
Another thing I would want to do is find some way to kinda visually represent just what kind of spread there is between the generations for me, and my relative amounts of like, as well as how much I feel those "like levels" fluctuate. While this was not at all scientific on my part, making the exact locations at least a little bit arbitrary, I did, nevertheless attempt an honest portrayal of my relative appreciation for all the generations. And of course, those feelings fluctuate a bit. They're not a rigid value all the time. So, I'm gonna try my hand at a sort of spectrum graph which demonstrate how I feel about them (or in the case of 8th Gen, how I anticipate I will feel about them and/or how excited I am about them) I'm gonna actually do four of these graphs, the first is how I gauge my feelings for each of them when they're at their peak. Then I will do another with how I feel about them when they're at their trough. Next, I will attempt to represent how I feel about them when my feelings are more neutral or baseline. Finally, I'll make a graph which is a composite of all three. The lists above are basically an averaging of all of this (hence why these could possibly deviate from the above lists above at one or two points).

Here goes nothing:

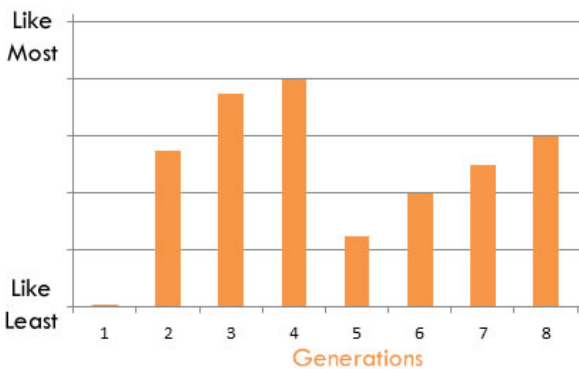
When my feelings for each generation are at their peak:



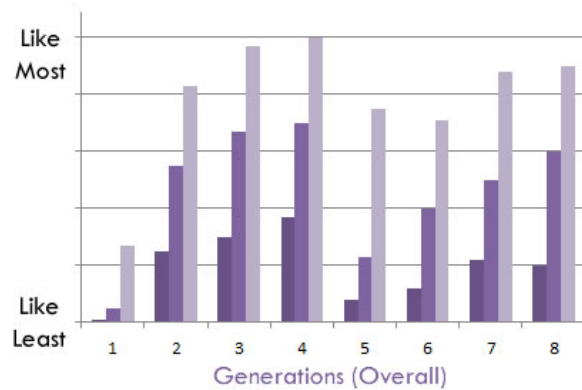
When my feelings for each generation are at their trough:



When my feelings for each generation are more or less baseline:



Master composite graph:



Now, as an "Omni-School" gamer (who admittedly has a pronounced retro-lean), one thing I hear from both camps is that there was no innovation or diversity in the rival generation. Rather than completely rewriting this (since I'm up against the article submission deadline...again), I am taking a conversation I had with a retro-gaming friend making this complaint against the current gen, and simply removing all things which would betray precisely who I was dialoging with, and share it otherwise essentially unmodified, since it addresses both sides of the complaint, not just his:

"First, let me say that A) I am very sympathetic when you say that there seems to be a real sameness to 7th and 8th gen gaming that was not present in 2nd, 3rd, and 4th generations, but B) I don't know if I agree. I gather from your post that we're of a very similar age (I'm 33, and my birthday is in Feb), and as such, you and I grew up in an era where the 1st gen was fable, 2nd gen was formative, 3rd gen was foundational, 4th gen was fullness, 5th gen was fantastical, and 6th gen was finesse (like my alliteration?) :-)

The point is, we grew up steeped in the stuff when it was all fresh, and new...the differences to us seemed huge. For the 7th and 8th Gen, we see most games falling into a handful of genres that either didn't exist then, or were niche, or existed, but looked and worked so much different "in our day" that they seem foreign, and we see all these games as basically just a variation on a theme...trivial trinket changes on the same game over and over again. Like Malibu Stacey's new hat (Simpson's references for 100, Alex!) I get that. But ask someone fifteen years younger than us who cut their teeth on PS1, and have grown into PS3. They grew up steeped in what we have now. They see Halo 4, Gears of War Judgment, and Black Ops II as wildly different games. They don't think Forza III and GT5 are very much alike at all, except for being of a common genre any more than we see Dragon Warrior and Final Fantasy alike.

But, they'd have the same problems seeing the differences in 2nd, 3rd, and 4th gen games (I think 5th and 6th are our two generation's transitional "neutral zone.") as many people of our generation struggle to see in the modern. They'd look at our collection of games, and just see platformers, or run and gun, or SHMUP, or RPG, or "One Room Planet" (most Atari 2600 games), or whatever. They wouldn't likely see any more of a meaningful difference between SMW and Sonic, Contra and Castlevania, R-Type and Gradius, or Combat and Armor Ambush than we see in their games.

Look, I definitely lean retro, but ultimately, I consider myself more of an "onmi-school" gamer, and from my chair, seeing both sides of this, I think what we've got going on here on both sides is a simple matter of perspective and preference, skewed by the cohort effect. It's like one guy's a wine connoisseur, who's not big into beer, and the other guy's a beer connoisseur, who's not big into wine. The wine connoisseur can tell all sorts of difference in wine varietals, but can't make a meaningful beer distinction in anything less overt than an IPA and a stout. And the beer guy is the opposite. He can tell you a million things about a million crazy fine distinctions in beer, but to him, a merlot is a merlot is a merlot. However, the guy who snobs both beer and wine might prefer one over the other as a whole, but can do a fine job "connoisseuring" either one.

As one who [continuing the metaphor] "snobs both beer and wine", I think that there's a great deal of truth to your "sameness" claim on modern gaming. But I also think the retro gens are just as guilty of the same. I also think there's a great deal of falseness to your "sameness" claim on modern gaming, and think the retro gens are just as innocent of it. In short, I don't know if I see a tremendous amount of difference between modern and retro as it concerns the "sameness/uniqueness" dynamic.

I think the better distinction, then, isn't whether one's samey or repetitive, and the other one's not, but rather, is it a mode of repetition we find enjoyable and engaging, or one we find tedious and annoying. For instance, shooting hoops, and screwing on mustard jar lids in a factory (obscure Powerpuff Girls references for 400, Alex!): Both are repetitive, but I personally would only find one of them entertaining and engaging. For me, 8-bit platformers, modern FPS, and even 2nd gen one room planet games are all like shooting hoops. If FPS are like mustard jars to you, and Atari is like mustard jars to Johnny Q 11yr old snot-nosed punk, then I'm fine with that, just so long as we all realize that shooting hoops and screwing on mustard jar lids are both repetitive and samey activities.

The new school is not as innovative, or, I think much better said, not as overtly innovative as the retro, but it makes up for it in a million other ways. And there's something to be said for the perfecting of innovation. While neither the 60's or the 70's are my favorite decade in music (I think that goes more to the 80's, probably), 60's music was far more innovative, imaginative, trailblazing, and groundbreaking than the 70's. But I still like 70's music in general better than 60's music, because while 60's music was innovative and avant garde, it was also rough, and awkward, and unpolished, and unsophisticated. Much of what happened in the 70's was a polishing, refining, and perfecting of the spark that happened in the 60's (with a healthy dose of innovation to boot). In this case, I prefer the perfection to the innovation. So, likewise, 3rd Gen was innovation, 4th gen, perfection. The 7th gen was an interesting mix of innovation (online suites, dlc, virtual consoles, etc), and perfection (high def graphics, better lighting and textures, etc). 8th gen, I anticipate to be mostly perfecting what happened in 7, just as 6th was mostly a perfecting of the innovation in 5.

One last point I'll bring up: You had mentioned that modern gaming is all about graphics, about looking beautiful. If your complaint would best be reworded "It's beauty without substance", I don't think I would agree. In fact, when it took maybe 1-6 hours of playtime to beat a retro game (and 1st gen is maybe 10 minutes), but takes 10-30 hours to beat a modern game, I don't see how a "lack of substance" charge can really be made to stick. I know, maybe two hours of that 10 hours might be cutscenes, but 8 hours is actual game play. And you might say, yeah, but it's 8 hours of just pointing a gun at an endless horde of baddies. True. But how is that fundamentally different than level after level of jumping on platforms, and stomping on baddies? Or, if your complaint would best be reworded "It puts the focus on graphics rather than gameplay", I don't think it's any more guilty of that as a whole than 4th generation was with the "console wars" (or any generation 4th gen and later, for that matter.) And I don't think that any generation, 4th, or 8th is focusing on graphics to the exclusion of meaningful gameplay (that'd be the "beauty without substance" thing again.)"

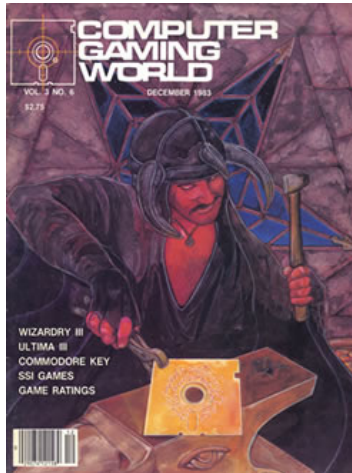
Okay, so that's my treatment on the various generations of gaming. I hope you found it educational, and enjoyable. Feel free to leave something in the comments section, showing how you'd rank them, and where and how you think I might be in err in my analyses. December is an absolute nightmare for postal carriers at the post office (or so, I'm told. This will be my first December as a mailman.) Therefore, I do not anticipate that I will have the time, or energy to write an article in December for January's issue. Count me out on that one for sure. Depending on how things go in January and February, I may or may not have Feb or Mar articles. But I should be back in the saddle by no later than March, I would think, so I can all but guarantee you'll hear from me by the April issue...if not sooner! Meanwhile, have a fantastic Christmas, and a Happy New Year, and thanks for reading!

Cheers!



Computer Gaming World

As I write this, it is Saturday November 30th, 2013. It is also a few days after Bryan's request for an article! With a busy schedule and the holidays, a bunch of things got lost in the shuffle. I was out of town for a day and only realized I forgot to submit an article after I got back.



I was going to try to write about several games but some games weren't playable and a lack of a joystick hinder my attempts at another game. Fortunately, I remembered that I had seen something I wanted to discuss and so now is a great time.

Back in the 1980s, I was a reader of many magazines. I've discussed the more Apple II oriented ones like A+, Incider, and Incider / A+. There are others I will talk about at a later point, but if you were looking for a game magazine there were many to choose from. One of the major ones in the 1980s was "Computer Gaming World".

I cannot remember when I started reading the magazine. I just know it was among the many I read during that time. I had read the magazine for several years but as the Apple II began to fade from the public eye and fewer game releases came out, I stopped reading many of the magazines I used to read.

A few months ago, after writing a column for RTM, I was curious what happened to Computer Gaming World. Thanks to the power of Google, I looked around and discovered a "Computer Gaming World Museum":

<http://www.cgwmuseum.org>

While I haven't looked through the entire museum, it did allow me to find out when I may have started reading the magazine:

<http://www.cgwmuseum.org/galleries/index.php?year=1988&pub=2&id=47>

I distinctly remember reading this issue as I had been eagerly looking forward to the release of Ultima V. I had read many magazines reviews and thoughts on the release of Ultima V. Re-reading the review of Ultima V and looking through the issue brought back some great memories.

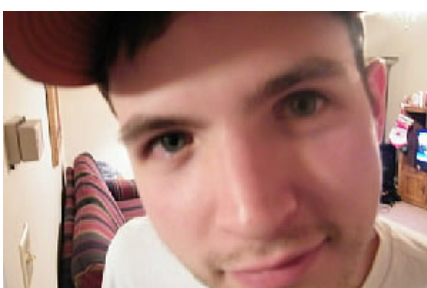
Interestingly enough, Computer Gaming World survived all the way until 2006 before the magazine ceased publication in favor of the "Games For Windows" magazine. For those who remember Computer Gaming World, the museum is treasure trove and well worth a visit for the memories.

Have a happy holiday season and be on the look out for a newly reformatted RTM in the near future. Just like the magazines of the past, changes have to occur for the magazine to move forward. More on that in the months to come.



Lessons From A Clueless Hopeful

The World Wide Web can be quite the intimidating place for someone whose experience with it doesn't normally include much more than spying on Facebook and watching YouTube videos. But about a year ago when I started listening to podcasts, I knew podcasting was something that I wanted to do. Recording my voice and cementing my thoughts to a sound file was a very attractive notion. The idea of connecting with like people who share the same sentiment and want to hear me talk, of course, was even more enticing.



I spent the next ten months making excuses. I am far too busy with school, work, and family. I really don't have anything interesting to say. There is probably a hundred other podcasts out there that would be better than me; why even try? What do I have that is special and unique that would make me stand out in the huge labyrinth of podcasts? Well, the answer to that last question may still be nothing; but I finally came to the realization that none of my excuses matter. It does not matter if anybody

likes my podcast because I will like it. I will listen to it. I want to look back on this, years from now, and say that I was proud that I tried and maybe there will be a person or two out there that will enjoy it.

So do I just sit in front of a mic, record my voice, put it up on the internet, and hope the world flocks to me? I could do that, but I doubt that the podcast would be very effective. I also doubt that I would stick with an ineffective podcast. I have a competitive spirit. I do not typically do things half way in the beginning. I may decide to half-heartedly do something after I have realized it is not working. But in the beginning, I take things head on and in a sprint.

It was time to devise a plan and this is where the advice starts. The plan includes four phases:

Phase I: Study. All I have listened to for the past year is podcasts. I love them. I take notes. I pick and choose the things that I think certain podcasts do right and I write it down. I want to expand upon what others do right and prevent myself from making the mistakes of others.

Phase II: Don't Adventure Alone. This may be the most important phase. I cannot do this on my own. I feel that in order to produce an effective podcast and gain a loyal following; I need to reach out to those who are already doing that very thing. I have been completely blown away by the responses I have received from the podcast community. Everyone is willing to extend a helping hand. The community is so much like a family it is almost hard to understand. I encourage anyone who is thinking about a podcast to reach out and email the podcasts that you listen to and admire. In reaching out to those who inspired me, I have a leg up that I didn't even know existed. Also, and I am not saying that this is a necessity, but I want to enjoy this with friends. I enjoy the company of my friends already. It is certainly easier for me to talk with other people than to try and talk by myself to a microphone. So I have assembled a team of people who I would call experts and we are moving forward together.

Phase III: Plan and Market. We can record five episodes and maybe reach a few listeners by the time we reach episode five; or we can reach out to people on social media and have a few listeners before we ever even start. Which option sounds better? I chose the latter. I have spent time on social media and time developing a website so that by the first recording; we will already have a few listeners. It may not seem like much, but in a race; I would much rather start three feet ahead of my competition.

Phase IV: Record and Don't Worry. This is the easiest part. I want to have fun and just talk about the things that make me happy. This world is huge. Whatever I talk about will also resonate with someone somewhere.

I still do not really know what I am doing. We have not recorded a single episode. We currently have a whopping zero listeners. We are, however, forging ahead full steam and I have the upmost confidence that we will do whatever it takes. We will put out a quality podcast. We will produce a quality website. We will actively engage with the community on social networks. Will it work? Will we be successful? Check back with me in a few months and I'll tell you.



Saturday Night Slam Masters

I noticed, upon writing this article, that this is the second wrestling themed article I am writing for this issue of RTM, which wasn't done on purpose, and yet, I am pleasantly surprised by this. Today we take a look at a game that, sadly, doesn't get the recognition it deserves, or at least a fair amount of attention from those folks who love Capcom and all of their amazing work over the years. I think the large part of the reason for this was the dismal sequel to this title, but that's another article for another time. Saturday Night Slam Masters was a game I stumbled upon during my days of toiling away with the SNES and I often revisit it when I feel the itch for something different. I decided to take another look at it, to see how it stacks up against other Capcom titles of the same era, as well as how the game looks and feels overall all these years later. Let's get in the ring!



"GET IN THE RING, GET TO RETROMANIA, BROTHER!!"-Landon

Sound 8

While there are certainly soundtracks on the SNES more impressive, even within the realm of Capcom, what we have here isn't too shabby either. You have the individual themes for the characters, which, while I wish they were longer, are still pretty cool, along with the title screen tunes and the character selection theme. The sounds of the actual action are pretty good, along with that stellar announcer. It's all packaged together pretty well, and in some ways is even better than the more licensed wrestling titles on the SNES, and that's saying something.

Graphics 8

The characters look like they'd fit well into any Capcom fighting title, which makes sense, since one of them is Haggar of Final Fight fame. Each character is unique and well designed, and I think this is something that often gets overlooked with this game. These characters had a nice blend of classic Capcom flare along with looks that scream the more outlandish styles of pro wrestling. The action is fairly fluid graphically, and while the crowds and the rings all look the same, they were designed fairly well too.



Then there was Oni. Come on, don't leave the guy hanging, give him a high five.

Gameplay 7

My one gripe with this game can summed up in two words, hit detection. My case in point is from personal experience. My favorite guy in this game is Oni. I love his speed and awesome spin kick that I use quite often. Well, while I love Haggar in Final Fight, I HATE him in this game. He's like the Hulk Hogan or John Cena of this game, in that you can swear you hit him, or even beat the tar out of him all match, then have him grab you, hit like 3 moves and then pin you. I am also not a big fan of how you can get pinned even with having plenty of life left. There's no real cue or help in breaking out of a pin, your guy just lies there, seemingly convulsing as he tries to kick out, but I've yet to kick out of a pin in this game. The controls aren't bad, but the pins and hit detection can be a major problem, and seem to appear more noticeable years later.



I hate you, even though you do a swell job as mayor.

Overall 7

Honestly, the decision of whether you should play this game or not is all a matter of personal preference. If you're someone who loyally plays classic Capcom titles, you'll get what you expect, for the most part. However, in some ways this game hasn't aged well, which is especially evident on some cheap wins from opponents and poor hit detection at times. I will say, definitely, if you grew up a fan of the licensed wrestling games this certainly isn't for you. But, if you can appreciate Capcom trying something new, and you played the sequel and hated it like most of us did, then you do owe it to yourself to pick up this title and give it a try. If nothing else, there's a fat guy pimp and a masked guy called Scorpion who hits the most ridiculous moves ever, and that's worthy of a few plays, right?

Thanks so much for all the kind words this year through Turn To Channel 3. I'm hoping to start the year with some fresh games to review. Yes, I said fresh, like linen scented dryer sheets. Man, those are awesome, aren't they?



"I agree, and I know how to do a Powerpoint!" said the cutest little bear ever.

Until then take care, and remember..

GAME ON!



Saturday At The Arcades

by Nick DeMarco



WWF Superstars

In my hometown of Scranton, PA, there is an old sporting goods store with batting cages in the floor above, and while I am fairly certain it's no longer still in the store, back when I was a little Atari Man, I would go there with my brother and play WWF Superstars while he would practice his batting swing. There's something to be said about having an era of your life where arcade machines could be found practically anywhere, and I miss those days, hence one of the many reasons I decided to start reviewing arcade titles in the last issue of RTM. Today, metaphorically, I return to this store, and get ready to pump more quarters into this

beauty. Ok, so I'm really just firing up the MAME emulator and pressing the coin button for credits, but we can pretend, right? For the second time this issue, let's head to the ring!

Sound 8

Like other wrestling arcade games, and many console ones for that matter, there's very little in the way of actual theme songs here. There are teases of them, like at the character select screen, but nothing that really attaches itself to the character. While there are some neat little bits prior to the match, the roaring crowd can get repetitive and annoying, and while the moves sound bone crunching, they really don't do much for the ears either. No friends, the sound in this game has the rating it does for one reason and one reason only, the incredibly cheesy and inaccurate ramblings of the Mega Bucks team of The Million Dollar Man and Andre The Giant. "No one can beat Mega Bucks!" "I'll put you to sleep with my Million Dollar Dream!" I still wonder why they couldn't get the actual voices in there. Had the actual voice of Andre The Giant and the Million Dollar Man been featured in this game, I'd definitely have to consider giving this game's sound a perfect 10.



The original wrestling gangstas. Yeah, I'm white.

Graphics 8

WWF Wrestlefest did a better job, but these cartoony and somewhat over the top versions of WWF superstars were pretty good too. I do wish the sprites were a bit larger, but this was the first real attempt at putting these characters in a video game, so I forgive them somewhat. I do love how some of the taunts and what not were accurate to the performers and the ring looked great, despite it being kind of small. I really loved the transition screens, shots of the arena, the teams coming to the ring, and the continue screen, all nice touches. Wrestling games would go leaps and bounds past this, but it was a nice starting point.

Gameplay 7

Perhaps for some folks who grew up on this game, some nagging problems can be overlooked, but for someone new to this game, it can be annoying and frustrating quite fast. For starters, I still, to this day, fail to understand how wrestling games made during an era where tag team wrestling was actually important, fail to have enough characters to have a variety of teams. Second, while I understand what developers were going for with the Mega Bucks team, if you don't have someone strong, like Hulk Hogan or The Ultimate Warrior, getting around Andre The Giant in the end can be a haul. Lastly, obviously your number of moves is limited, but to be fair that's pretty much in any wrestling game of the 80s or even most of the 90s for that matter.

Overall 7

Enjoy this game for what it is, a trek through time when wrestling was truly at it's peak, or at least, one of those times. Your moves may be limited, there may still be a lack of entrance themes throughout, but do get to play as some truly legendary wrestlers. Yes, having more characters would have been nice, but the hilarious voiceovers and the only great representation of Andre The Giant in a wrestling game (past or present) is worth your time I'd say.



He's so big and bad, he engulfs other Andre The Giants.

Thanks for joining me here at the arcades. Next year we step away from the wrestling games and journey onto some new territory. Where? Well, I haven't decided yet!

GAME ON!



7th Saga

Welcome, one and all, to this, the second edition of Know Your Role. This issue we're going to do things a little bit differently. While last issue, we talked about a game I'm very fond of, this time we're going to take a look at a game that, while I wouldn't say I hated growing up, one that I definitely have developed a love/hate relationship with over the years, 7th Saga by the folks at what is now Square Enix, but in this case, just the Enix part. Having recently purchased it, I decided to once again brave a game that had me frustrated at times as a youngster. Does the game hold up? Does it still anger me? When is the 8th Saga coming out? Ok, so that last one has an answer, never. Come along, folk from near and far, as we journey to the land of 7th Saga!

Sound 8

In RPGs, especially for the SNES, you either have a soundtrack that draws the gamer in, really connects with them, or one that gets overlooked, and sadly I think 7th Saga is the latter of those two, which is a shame really, because there are some great, albeit somewhat basic sounding tracks to discover in this game. The tune at the beginning, the song that plays in towns, as well as the battle music are all quite good. The sounds of the action aren't the best in an RPG, but they're still pretty good too. The sad part is this may actually be the strongest part of the game.

Graphics 7

While the towns, castles, and caves all seem fairly well designed, it's the characters as they stand in battle, along with the enemies that really showcase some great graphic work in this game. I may not like that whole pixelated look that's commonplace in SNES games during certain sections, but it serves its purpose I guess. I think what drives me nuts is there's a complete lack of creativity overall here. There are a lot of repetitive characters in towns along with enemies, and the map design is kind of bleak and poor in some aspects. It's still up for debate among my friends and I whether this game aged well graphically or not.

Gameplay 5

One thing that hasn't aged well is the frustrating gameplay in certain aspects in this game. The worst part is these aspects are kind of key in having an enjoyable experience in an RPG. The enemies get hard, REALLY hard, REALLY quick, and while there is an option to run, it rarely if ever works. Yes, it's fun to take a companion with you, and you can always turn on them and try to steal their treasures, but they are usually WAY more experienced than you are, and if you lose, any key items you have they take with them! Lastly, even though it is a common to be in situations in RPGs where you lose and have to fight your way back to where you were, the fact the enemies are just SO tough in certain sections makes you want to give up quicker than in games that either offer save points or go easier on you early on. Did I mention a treasure chest can turn into an enemy? Yeah, as much as there are things I love about this game, I realized playing it again I definitely went in there with blinders on as a kid. This game is rough around the edges.



"That's putting it lightly," said the demon about to kick my butt.

Overall 6

Certainly if you enjoy a stiff (and I mean STIFF) challenge in an RPG, 7th Saga will give you all you can handle plus some great tunes and some decent graphics to go along with it. However, if you are expecting a Final Fantasy or Chrono Trigger type experience you will be sadly disappointed. 7th Saga is a game that sounded great on paper, and while it has moments of greatness just really doesn't live up to a lot of other great Enix RPGs I feel.



Uh, yeah, that's great. I'll just be over here, playing Illusion Of Gaia.

Well, I hope now you KNOW YOUR ROLE and will continue to join me as we start next year with a whole new RPG. Which one? I'll consult with my Magic 8-Ball!



Freeze

In the spirit of the season this is the story of Freeze, starring the worst star pilot in the galaxy. Or perhaps just an average one flying the latest space ship by Yugo.



His ship has suffered a critical power loss, forcing him to land on a frozen alien planet. While his piloting skills are dubious, for some reason he knows a magic crystal deep inside the caverns of the planet will fix things. So he sets off with his jetpack and flamethrower to elude inhabitants in what turns out to be a fairly lengthy trip there and back, makes the repair – and proceeds to have the same malfunction almost immediately on takeoff and land on what's presumably the next (but strangely identical-looking) planet.

Play this 1982 game by Cinematronics long enough and you'll crash-land on more planets than Santa does chimneys (admittedly, it would probably take several times your natural lifespan). Not only does Our Hero prove amazingly inept by attempting the same flawed repair each time, but he apparently grew up on Tatooine because getting hit by snowballs is fatal, as is standing still in the cold for more than a few seconds.

There's also something amiss about the native inhabitants of those planets since they seem to be mostly roly-poly robots who throw the aforementioned snowballs, raising the question of who maintains them unless it's the bats that hide in caves until an intruder such as your pilot gets near. Another strange phenomena is the ice walls that block access to many parts of the maze. They can be melted with the flamethrower, but they regenerate almost immediately and will trap your pilot inside if he doesn't move quickly enough.

His misadventures are actually rather entertaining from a gamer's perspective, but here's hoping the plot of Star Wars VII is better than this (since it's Disney, I'm not optimistic).

Speaking of wish lists, here's Cinematronics' pitch for Freeze in its dealer brochure: "Proof positive that the hottest game in town is as cold as ice." Like many games of the era, it tried to cash in by stealing elements from megahits at the time.

"I sewed the Joust mechanic of 'pumping' the thrust mechanism with the Defender mechanic of flipping left and right," said Bob Skinner, the game's designer, in an interview posted at Keith Smith's blog The Golden Age Arcade Historian. He also threw in "a flamethrower from somewhere, and an economy of fuel for the jetpack and flamethrower."

(Spirit of the Season Tidbit #2: Freeze uses recycled two-year-old hardware from Naughty Boy – "one of the earlier marketing debacles," according to Skinner – which is cited as one reason for its lump-of-coal showing in the marketplace.)



Most of the "borrowed" elements don't really measure up to their predecessors when playing Freeze. Having to constantly "flap" to fly around with a jetpack doesn't feel natural, and the "Defender" mechanism is misleading because your pilot doesn't have the speedy and precise movements of the Williams classic. The necessity of refueling your flamethrower and jetpack – achieved by collecting the many small crystals scattered in the caverns – also makes this more of a strategic game than the annihilation of destruction that Defender is.

One other major hitch is what appears to be a bug that occasionally your pilot gets snagged by some cavern formation he can't escape from, leaving no alternative but to watch him quickly freeze to death. It didn't happen often enough to put me off the game, but any game inflicting undeserved deaths earns a pretty serious strike against it.

Despite those flaws, Freeze is worth playing in MAME for its exploratory thrill since you can bumble about in the vast alien caverns without losing vast amounts of money as you die a vast number of times figuring out how to get There And Back Again.

Freeze was one of several games purchased by Cinematronics in a desperate hope one of them would become a hit and keep the struggling company alive, according to the book "Before the Crash: Early Video Game History" by Mark Wolf, a programmer for the company who left shortly before the acquisitions. None of the games succeeded and the company filed for bankruptcy, although it managed to reorganize and survive a bit longer when it stuck gold with Dragon's Lair in 1983.

(Spirit of the Season Tidbit #3: It's worth noting the flyer also promoted Freeze as "designed to maximize operator flexibility with minimal need for maintenance," a refreshing change from the explosion of boasts about new and creative ways of getting more quarters from players for shorter games.)

Freeze's flaw as a quarter-eater isn't necessarily a lack of quality or longevity. It's got plenty of depth and challenge since you need to jetpack your pilot through a multitude of screens in search of that elusive magic crystal. But the difficulty level is punishing from the start and completing your first repair is so tough beginning players aren't likely to sacrifice enough coins to gain the necessary proficiency. Although arcade gamers would embraced even more expansive exploring shooters like Gauntlet a few years later (which didn't impose the classic three-lives-and-out limit), Freeze feels more like one of the many home computer games in this genre – think Pharaoh's Curse or Shamus – at the time.

The good news, of course, is MAMEers can tweak the DIP switches (easy/hard and three/five starting lives) to aid their efforts or – if they're more impatient types – use an infinite lives cheat code (I plead guilty, so feel no shame in doing so yourself).



Gaming Studies With The Tomy Tutor

by David Lundin, Jr.

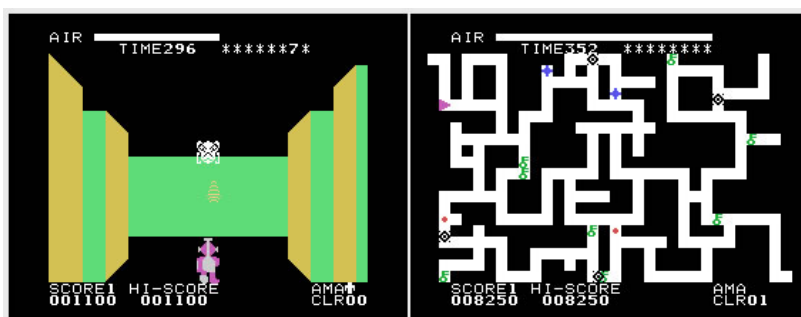


Cave Crawlers

So here we are at last, the final Tomy Tutor cartridge released in the United States. Cave Crawlers is the game in the Tutor library that tends to stir up the most curiosity among those new to the platform with its 3D mazes, third person perspective, vast maps and gameplay not directly based off an arcade original. It's the game that looks like something more than an arcadey diversion to waste a few minutes with. Yet what appears at first glance to be one of the most complex and advanced games for the computer is in fact one of the simplest action games you could imagine. Simple games can be fun though, as the majority of games on the Tomy Tutor are simple arcade ports done very, very well. Take a simple shooter, shove it into a simplified dungeon perspective from an early Wizardry game and you have Cave Crawlers. Let's check it out, in this final installment of Gaming Studies with the Tomy Tutor.

Direct your cave explorer from the entrance of an underground maze to the exit door on the other side. The exit is locked with a specific numbered key which can be found, along with seven others, within the depths of the cave network. The required key can be different every time, as are the positions of the eight keys themselves. So do you attempt to pick up every key on the way to the exit, guaranteeing that you will be able to unlock the door? Perhaps getting to the exit as quickly as possible to see which key is required, then searching for that specific key and doubling back to the exit would be easier? Regardless of your strategy the timer is always ticking down and your air supply is constantly depleting. Not to mention there are hordes of deadly cave monsters wandering the labyrinths as well, which can only be dispatched with your trusty blaster. Good thing you came equipped with a radar guided map but every time it is consulted you lose more and more precious air. Plot your path through the maze, keep your trigger finger ready, pick up those keys, and you might make it out alive.

Cave Crawlers, at least on paper, sounds awesome especially considering the hardware it is on. At its core this game is a simplified third person dungeon crawler complete with resource management, coupled with an action shooter. Each game begins at the map screen with the objective being to make it from the entrance in the upper left corner of the map to the locked exit located at the bottom right. That's actually how the manual describes the object of the game, "get from the top left corner to the bottom right corner of the cave," such imagination! The map screen displays not only the various paths and dead ends along the way to the exit but also the status of every object in the maze. These include the all important keys, your current location and direction, air refill locations, transfer points, and the current whereabouts of the wandering monsters. Air refills, displayed as red dots, will replenish a portion of the air meter once stepped into. The amount of air they refill is generally pretty small so working their locations into your plan of attack is critical, especially after the first stage. Keys, represented by the green skeleton key icons, display a number once their square is stepped into. As each key is collected their respective number is added to your collection at the top of the screen. Finding the key that corresponds to the lock on the exit door, and then reaching the exit door with the proper key in hand, is how a level is completed. Transfer points, displayed as blue crosses, act more like traps. Once they are stepped on your explorer will be teleported to another location in the maze. However this location is unpredictable and you can be sent anywhere in the entire maze, necessitating another check of the map to get your bearings. Monsters, represented by black diamonds, constantly move throughout the maze whenever the map is not displayed. They will fly overhead and swoop down, instantly killing your explorer in a wash of blood. Monster attacks from the sides and rear are always fatal and monsters approaching from the front must be quickly dispatched with a blaster shot to prevent death. Additionally the monsters are the only visible objects when in the regular game view, as everything else is activated once stepped upon, with no indication that there is something on the path ahead until it is already in work. This makes juggling the map and remembering where you are headed a critical skill to finding keys while avoiding transfer points and monster encounters from the sides and rear.



Movement is controlled via the stick on the Joystick or control disc on the Joy Controllers. Pressing Up will cause your explorer to advance forward, one step per press or at a brisk run if held down. Pressing Down will have the explorer turn around briefly before flipping the perspective behind him once again. Pressing Left or Right will cause the explorer to turn left or right but only when there isn't a wall blocking the direction of travel. Control is responsive but almost too responsive considering how strict the game is when it comes to making turns. Partially due to the shallow perspective of the game's 3D hallways, left and right corridors have to be at the very near edge of the screen before they can be turned down. No matter how much I play the game, it always feels like you have to walk past a corridor before you can turn down it. Once you are in position to make a turn, the explorer will turn and walk to the side for a few steps before the screen is reoriented behind him once again, facing in the new direction. This is a slow and clunky movement that is activated by a single press of Left or Right. In contrast, advancing forward can be performed at a breakneck pace by holding Up, forcing you to tap the control disc or stick very carefully to line up your turns. Overshooting means that you have to press Down, wait for the 180 degree turnaround, remember that you are now facing the other direction, walk up to the side corridor and then attempt to make your turn once again. All while monsters are constantly moving throughout the maze, closing in on your location just to strike from the side due to all the walking around in circles you're doing. As for shooting the monsters, SR must be pressed in the split second they are directly overhead. Missing a shot by pressing SR at the wrong time means instant death and Cave Crawlers doesn't mess around in this department, as the screen is filled with a cascade of blood from top to bottom. To see something like that in a Tutor game is mildly amusing the first few times but it quickly becomes

a symbol of frustration due to having to baby the controls while monsters close in at every turn. Pressing SL brings up the map, which is displayed for a few seconds before returning to the main game perspective.

The mazes themselves seem to be randomly generated or randomly pieced together from varied sections, this is the same with the locations of the objects within the mazes. Only the starting point and the exit door are always in the same area. This random object placement can lead to some pretty unbalanced gameplay however. Sometimes all the air refills will be near the front of the maze, meaning you are either forced to pick them up early on when you don't need them or have to backtrack through the entire maze later in the stage to replenish your supply. Transfer points can also cause a lot of frustration if they are placed in unavoidable locations. I have had more than one game completely spoiled by this occurrence as I had no choice but to step on a transfer point, which dropped me right on top of a monster in a dead end corridor, killing me instantly. As subsequent lives start you in the same location as where you were killed, the game once again dropped me right on top of the monster since it was stuck in the dead end corridor. Due to the placements the monster couldn't be killed or avoided and this scene played out repeatedly until I was out of lives and it was game over.

Now there are some things here that I really do like. When looking down a long corridor you can sometimes see monsters float back and forth in the distance, moving throughout the maze, making the game feel a little more "alive." Sometimes they'll approach you, sometimes they'll just go about their business, it's as if they're actually looking for you and you can slip away if you are unnoticed. Turning a corner to have a monster come forward or spring out from a side corridor can create some moments of true surprise and tension. Knowing that unless you take care of them at exactly the right moment you will die, makes Cave Crawlers more of an early survival horror game than anything resembling an early first person shooter, as it is usually described. After knocking out a few stages you will genuinely jump when a monster appears unexpectedly, prepared to end your game in a moment's notice. I suppose the minimal sound effects lend themselves well to this tension but lack of a good audio package tends to come across as lazy more than anything.

In Japan Cave Crawlers was known as Maze Patrol which I think is a much better title. The environments in the game really don't resemble caves and the story on the back of the box about being blindfolded before being dropped into the maze is just ridiculous. Speaking of ridiculous, what exactly is your explorer supposed to be wearing? Is he a spaceman, a deep sea diver, a kid in footed pajamas? He sure as heck doesn't look like any kind of cave explorer and the picture on the cover of the box makes him look like an exterminator in a clean room. This game was ambitious, I will give it that, and it's unlike anything else released on the Tomy Tutor. However I have always felt that this game began life as a simple dungeon crawler that had a sci-fi element tacked onto it when it was realized that the Tutor simply couldn't replicate a Western style computer RPG. Taken as it is, this ambitious game dissolves into a short little diversion. Compared to the rest of the Tutor library, it just can't complete with the Konami arcade ports - games that were actually developed to be fun diversions from the start.

As all ten of the Tomy Tutor cartridges released in the USA have now been covered I wanted to cap this column off with my personal recommendations for what to play on this interesting platform. In the time since Gaming Studies with the Tomy Tutor began, the value Tutor stuff has continued to fluctuate all over the place on the open market. However, there have been some solid periods where lots of Tutor hardware and games have come up for sale, both at auction and on private message boards. I stand by what I have said for years, if you are willing to wait and kick the tires for awhile, you can find a Tomy Tutor computer for \$50.00 or so. Joy Controllers, about \$20.00 on their own, and loose games no more than \$15.00 - \$20.00 per cartridge for USA released titles. Complete games will hold more value but not much more than double a loose price at the very highest. All prices are US Dollars, of course. As for game recommendations, Jungler is still my favorite game on the platform and a spectacular port of an all but forgotten Konami arcade game. Loco-Motion will follow, for the same reason; it's a great port of a great arcade game that didn't have many home ports. Other than that you really can't go wrong with Traffic Jam as it's generally regarded as the most popular Tomy Tutor game and is an interesting original title that tends to get people interested in the hardware. With that, we complete and close this column at Retrogaming Times Monthly, thank you for reading.

However as with many video game systems developed in Japan, there were some games that never saw the light of day outside the Land of the Rising Sun...

"InsaneDavid" also covers all types of video gaming at <http://www.classicplastic.net/dvgi>



NES Review

All good things come to an end and might as well end it with a review of one of the greatest retro systems of all time! Don't think of this as the end but the completion of a chapter.



The Nintendo Entertainment System, the gaming console that resurrected a dying industry and brought it back into the spotlight. Originally marketed as a toy and packaged with a robot (R.O.B.), the NES took a life onto it's own and became the leader in a video game revival. Gaming was at it's silver age and things were only going to get better from here.

Design

The original NES was basically a box, nothing pretty but it got the job done. There is a lid the protects the game slot from dust. The medium used for games was cartridge based, just like the Atari, but was lot bigger. Once you put your game in, you must press down for the game to work. While this wasn't too much of a problem, after the console got worn, the chips from the game cartridge would not align properly and cause games to malfunction. The NES, near the end of it's lifespan, was redesigned smaller, sleeker and a top loader like it's older sibling the SNES. This seemed to alleviate a lot of the problems that plagued the original design but it was too little too late.

Controllers

The controller design was simple with just the right amount of buttons for any task the NES needed. It's responsiveness was unparalleled and set a standard that Nintendo has maintained to this day. The only issue was the shape, which was a rectangle.

Although the shape matched the console's, it wasn't fitting to a gamer's hand; which is why all future controllers would be either circular or hand fitting.

Library Strength



With a library of well over 700 licensed NES games released in the US and hundreds of other unlicensed ones, there is a game for everyone. All the classics are here that made Nintendo the powerhouse they are today. Another great thing was the outstanding third party games, even going as far as creating new companies to make more games. (ex:Konami/Ultra) While the NES had it's share of bad games, they still have a nostalgic quality about them that people love to hate.

Collectability

The NES, as a classic console, has a very high rate of collectability. While you can get a lot of common games for a dollar, you will be hard pressed to located some of the rarer games. Another aspect to NES collecting is the Famicom, which was the Japanese release of the console, which had a lot of Japan only exclusives.

Overall

The Nintendo Entertainment System is on a whole a great system and while it does have it's faults, we as gamers have learned to love them. Call it tough love if you will, but the NES is one console that will forever be referred to when anyone mentions classic gaming.



Well, here comes to close the 2013 Christmas issue. We'll see you again in January where we'll be saying some goodbye's, but not final goodbyes, just a passing of the torch so to speak. So to all those out there reading this, I encourage you to submit an article on any retro items you got for Christmas, as we'd all love to read about them.

Anyways, have a happy New Year and I'll be back in January with more info on The Retro Junkies buyout and when you expect the move to occur. Until then...