Health & Mana

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Forword
By ProxyFox

Greetings Dudes and Lady Dudes!

Welcome to our "only a few days… ok a couple weeks late" issue of Health & Mana! As gamers, we all know what it's like to get so involved in a game that you lose all track of time and end up finding later, after emerging from your incredible adventure, that law enforcement has declared you legally dead and the whole world has changed. Basically, that's what happened to us here at the studio, except we were playing life (great graphics, but the gameplay kind of stinks).

That being said, our editor had a major move to go through and our creative director was studying hard for semester finals at college, so we're a bit behind. None the less, we thank you all for your patience in waiting for our Retro issue of Health & Mana! With our new studio space getting set up and summer vacation upon us, we can't wait to continue evolving our e-mag to better entertain all of you that take the time to read it!

Thank you all many much and stay awesome!

-ProxyFox

It's Retro To Me

By ElatedSacrifice

When most gamers hear retro they think of the NES, SNES, Genesis. Some go even further back and think of the Atari or Calico-Vision. Well, I have played both an Atari and a Calico-Vision, but not while I was a child. Retro to me means the first system I ever owned, the one that made me the gamer I am today, a Playstation.

I did not start playing the old gray rectangle [NES] a lot of us came to know and love. I have very fond memories of playing my brother's Sega Genesis. I was a much bigger fan of Sonic than I ever was of Mario, forgive me. I also enjoyed the Earthworm Jim games quite a bit, who didn't love the music in those? There were a few others but nothing that really captured my interest at such an early age. Shortly after my Genesis phase, my brother got a Sega Gamegear, complete with the magnifying attachment which only added to the bulky awkwardness of the handheld, if you could even call it that. I had only 2 or 3 cartridges but the one I played the most was Garfield - Caught in the Act. A bit of a strange game, you played as the cat stuck in the TV world.

Above all I remember going with my brother to his friend's house to hang out, and he had the first Playstation. Those black discs were unlike anything I had ever seen. The first game I played on it shattered my little mind. The game was Machine Head. There are not a lot of people I know who ever played the game, much less heard of it. Basically you were a supermodel connected to a floating gunship of sorts by a computer geek/genius and it was your job to save humanity from some sort of red virus that had infected the planet. It was a fast paced run and gun style of game and it was amazing, but it wasn't the game that really made me a gamer.

Eventually my brother got his hands on his own Playstation and a handful of games he borrowed from his buddies. Gran Turismo, Crash Bandicoot, Medievil, all great games but the one I bought for myself became an iconic part of my early gamer life and its own legend within that era of games; I bought Final Fantasy VII. The visuals were beautiful at the time, we all know the game did not age well. This was the first time I got so involved in a storyline within a video game. The characters resonated with me, the world was so huge compared to anything I had played until that point. To this day it is one of the few games that I have fully completed, somewhere on an old memory card rests my save file with over 200 hours invested in it. I don't even remember how many times I replayed that game. Whenever the characters show up in anything else it makes me feel like that young boy whose breath was taken away the first time he played through the title. Kingdom Hearts 1 and 2 were big games for me because of this reason; also two more games I fully completed. This game is the game that made me the gamer I am today. If this game never came into my life I may not have been such a fan of RPGs. Hell, I may not have ever been as into games as I am without it, period.

Retro to me doesn't have to mean a controller that consisted of one button and a stick, it means whatever feels old to you and that is going to mean a lot of different things to a lot of different people. The game that made you a gamer, be it Pokemon, Halo: CE, Final Fantasy, or something no one knows about like Machine Head, you should cherish that game. Thank that game for being there making you the player you are now. Without the systems or games we had as kids none of us would have the passion for the systems and games we have now. Ever notice we play a game and whether we thought it was mediocre or fantastic it doesn't resonate with us like some of our older games do? Learn to love your roots and never forget where you started and what got you to where you are as a gamer.

Stay safe out there friends, and game on

Top Ten NES Games

By: M.Spider

10. Bionic Commando

Bionic Commando is a very odd game, even by NES standards. It is one of the only platform error games I can think of that doesn't have a jump. The game forces you to use your Bionic arm claw thing to maneuver around the stage by climbing and swinging all while avoiding enemy fire creating a very different experience compared to most platforming on the NES.
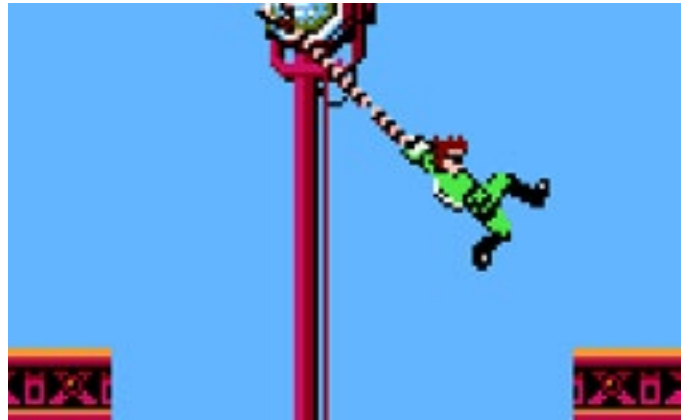
9. Master Blaster

Another oddball in our list, Master Blaster is a platform and top down perspective explorer. It switches game-play cleverly between 2D platforming in your mobile tank to top-down exploration on foot to keep things interesting. Despite the weak plot of finding your pet frog this game is very enjoyable.

8. Batman

I didn't think much of this game when I first saw it, but after playing… wow. Easily one of the most solid platforming titles on the NES. As a Batman game it's nothing special, and seems like being a Batman title may have been a marketing afterthought but even so, it is a title worth a shot.

7. Dragon Warrior

Ah, Dragon Warrior. I'm sure DW2 or 3 could also fill this slot, but I personally never played them. As the first RPG to grace the NES this game certainly delivers on what would become some of the crucial RPG trappings of early console RPGs, and did so quite well.

6. Contra

The game that made the Konami code famous. A sci-fi platformer that has driven many a gamer mad with one hit deaths and only 3 lives to start with. The famous code remedies one of those headaches, by giving players a whopping 30 lives to play with. Honestly I never beat this game without the code, but then again, I only played this game a few times starting about 5 years ago, so yea, the difficulty still holds up to this day.

5. Ninja Gaiden

Ninja Gaiden: one of the first forays into a game with a self contained story. For those of you too young to remember, video games used to come with printed instruction manuals, and while games post NES only had a short preview of a games story, NES Games relied heavily on instruction manuals to speel out the story for the gamers. Ninja Gaiden is a game where you play as a ninja and, as such, is holy-shit hard as hell. Everything in this game is designed to kill you. Yes you have health, and can take a few hits before you die, but that won't help you when that bird clips you mid-jump sending you into a pit of death now, will it. Great game great challenge. You have been warned.

4. Super Mario Brothers 3

Somehow, Mario will find his way onto most top ten lists centered around Nintendo or platformers. I guess you can't mess with a good thing. Even his transition to 3D set the bar but that's not what we are here for. Super Mario Brothers 3 could possibly be his best 2D platformer and certainly his best game on the NES, bar none. Whether you warp-whistle your way straight to the end or play through every level the game has to offer, your in for a very fun and tight platformer with very few issues.

3. Final Fantasy

Final Fantasy, much like Dragon Warrior, helped to build the archetype for console-style RPGs. Giving us six classes to build a four-man party out of was genius and added replay value to an already long game for the time.

2. The Legend of Zelda

The Legend of Zelda is a very obtuse game that doesn't give the player much to go on. I would probably still be trying to beat this game if it weren't for the internet and all the guides and maps. Some of the secrets and ways to get into dungeons, well, let's just say that not many sane individuals would even come close to figuring them out. Despite all that, the game is still fun, even if I would have lost my mind playing it when I was younger.

1. Megaman 3

Let the debate begin. There are many people who would say that Megaman 2 should be in this spot, and while it is amazing and set the standards for Megaman games to come, Megaman 3, in my opinion, is better in every way except maybe some of the music. Gotta love that Wily stage 1 music from Megaman 2. Megaman 3 introduces the slide, seven fun robot masters and one lame one, a rematch against all eight robot matters from Megaman 2, and the best damn rush jet to date. Either way you can't go wrong with Megaman 2 or 3 and you would be remiss not to give at least one of them an honest try.

Always Look on the Hard Side of Games

By: Andrew Penniman

When many people think of retro video games they think of the difficulty being higher than that of the normal standard of today's games. For me, who started playing as an toddler, I never really saw the games I played as difficult games. I saw them as games that I was too inexperienced to play. Today, those games I found hard in my past are still hard and I know it's not because I'm inexperienced. Games like Mega Man and Contra are revered today because of their difficulty and their well crafted gameplay. So why are games easier than those of the past? Beating a game while I was a kid was a euphoric time for me. It showed me that I could be just as good as the older kids, and that skill didn't equate with age but with practice. Nowadays when a kid beats a game it's almost dismissive, or can be patronizing. "Good for you Jimmy. You beat an easy game. You want a cookie?" It's similar to giving a participation trophy to a child. Should we reward people for not working for it? Personally, I think it's wrong and serves no benefit.

Back in the day games didn't really have the option to be easy. If a game was too easy the buyer might have an hour or two of playtime and, if beaten, would feel disappointed or maybe even betrayed. The greatest example for me would be Pinocchio on the Sega Genesis. I got it on one of my birthdays, my brother asked if he could play it and I said yes. Around two hours later he comes up from the basement and tells us he beat the game. I played it once and stopped playing before I could beat the first level because it was so boring. Needless to say the game gave us a bad experience and we never touched it again.

Inversely, games that at least had some difficulty are some of my all time favorite games. Wonder Boy in Monster World, Gadget Twins, and Mega Man are games that I still play today and still have a joyous time playing. While nostalgia does play a part in my enjoyment, I am adamant that even newcomers would enjoy these games.

I'm not saying easy games are bad, The Unfinished Swan is a very easy game but I still have a love for it. I'm just saying that easy games are less rewarding, more so back in the 80's and 90's, whether it be emotional or a reward in the game itself. Plain and simple when you work hard for anything you have a better appreciation for it.

I have a high respect for games that have a true sense of difficulty and I definitely spend more time on those games even after I beat them. I love the sense of accomplishment I get when I figure out my own strategy to beat a certain boss or when I have to fine-tune my skills to get over that next hurdle. It's a way for me to show my love to video games in general. I don't want to play a game that spoon feeds you power ups or tells you what works best before I even have the chance to figure it out myself. I want that game that lets me learn on my own terms and from my own mistakes.

I urge our readers to stick with a game, even if it's too difficult. With enough perseverance you can accomplish anything. It might take others a bit longer but won't that mean the end results that much sweeter. Also, especially to our younger readers, take a look at the games that were made before you started playing, you might just find a gem we grew up on.

To start you off take at look a the Top Ten 8-bit Games and 16-bit Games for some amazing games. Each game has a great sense of difficulty and offers various types of game play. If you look closely you see that most of those games still influence today's games of the same genre.

Top Ten 16-Bit Games

By: M.Spider

10.Gadget Twins

Gadget Twins is a game that few know of, and it would seem fewer have played. My brother and I would play this game over and over. It didn't matter how many times we beat it, the music and gameplay kept us coming back for more fun time and time again.

9.King of Dragons

Ah King of Dragons, a Super Nintendo gem I only wish I had discovered sooner. This game is a classic beat-em-up with a little bit of RPG sprinkled in for good measure. Solid game-play rounds out the experience with a medieval setting.

8.Super Metroid

What can I say about Super Metroid that hasn't been said a hundred times already? It is the epitome of sci-fi games on the SNES. Great controls, a strong female protagonist, and interesting boss fights make this a game that every gamer should at least try.

7.Super Street Fighter 2

Super Street Fighter 2 set the basic formula for the fighting game genre and is still played competitively to this day in one format or another.

6.Chrono Trigger

Many people will argue that Chrono Trigger is one of the best RPG's of all time, and I have a hard time disagreeing with them. Everything from gameplay to story is on point in this SNES game.

5.Super Mario World

Ah, yes, Super Mario World. I don't know anyone who had a SNES and didn't have this game, and it's no wonder why. Easily one of the best Mario games I have ever had the pleasure of playing.

4.Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 4 Turtles in Time

Growing up with a Sega Genesis, I really wanted to put Hypersonic Heist in this spot, but Turtles in Time is superior in every way. Both games are great old school beat-em-ups and any fan of that genre should play both of these if they get the chance.

3.Sonic the Hedgehog 3 with Sonic and Knuckles

Nostalgia may play a big role in this combo's placement because the Sonic games are definitely flawed gems. Despite the flaws this is still a game that to this day I could pick up and have fun with. Great music, interesting level design (even if it's flawed), and the ability to actually save your progress throughout gave both of these games an edge back in the day.

2.The Legend of Zelda A Link to the Past

Poor Link, to this day your still confused with Zelda. This game is often considered one of the best if not the best Zelda game.

1. Megaman X

I first played this game for the pc back in 1995 and I couldn't get enough of it. Everything is amazing, from the difficulty to the level design. An incredible game and I can't think of any other game that I could have given this spot to.

Unplugged:
Rolling Back The Dice

By: DarkWave

What if I told you that playing video games is not the only way to become a gamer? What if I could introduce you to a game of fantasy and adventure far more expansive than any RPG you have ever played? Back in the early 1970's Gary Gygax decided to give us that very game and that game is Dungeons & Dragons, or D&D, for short. Dungeons & Dragons is the spark that gave us the fantasy games we know and love today. Despite the rapidly advancing video game industry D&D has stayed relevant and even grown in popularity over the years.

More and more video games have begun giving the player the ability to make choices that directly affect them in the game world. Along with that came the ability to choose how our characters looked and in some cases even their tone of voice. As gamers we love these options because they give us feelings of creativity and control. Unfortunately no matter how detailed the game is or how many options we have during character creation, video games will always be limited by their programming. D&D will never have this problem because the only limitation is the creativity of those playing the game.

One of my favorite fantasy RPGs to play is the original Final Fantasy and I fully admit the reason I love it so much is because of the large amount of influence it pulled from D&D. Final Fantasy was such a hit that it saved Square, the company that produced the game, from bankruptcy. From here on the fantasy and RPG genres exploded in popularity. If it was not for D&D we may never have had our beloved RPG video games.

Not only has D&D brought us many of our favorite games but it also has brought people together. In a world where multi-player games no longer require you to be in the same building as your friends, gamers can find it difficult to stay socially active. The best feeling I have is when I get together with my D&D group every Saturday and start rolling those dice. Game night is more than just hanging out together. We plan meals, keep up on events in each others' lives, and share something we all care greatly for. I have never seen someone become as emotionally invested in a video game as they do in a game of D&D. Not too long ago in a game that I DM for the rogue in the party died. This event caused several of the players to shed very real tears. When you play D&D you invest your time, energy, and self into everything that is your character or the world itself if you are the Dungeon Master. Video games can never truly give you these feelings because the world and characters are built for you. Now don't get me wrong, I love a good video game the same way I love a good book. But games like D&D give you the freedom to weave your own story. There are few feelings in the world like being enraptured by a good story.

Speaking of a good story there is nothing more valuable than a good Dungeon Master. In D&D the Dungeon Master, or DM, creates and controls the world in which you play the game. Every dungeon you delve, dragon you slay, and barkeep you talk to for information are all controlled by the DM. The DM's job is not to kill your characters or hand you great power but to turn you into heroes. The mark of a truly great DM is when their players speak of their in game adventures as if they actually went out and did these things. Never let go of a Dungeon Master who can truly transport you into another world all their own.

Now if building the world and telling the story is not your style then you might like to try being a Player Character or PC for short. There are usually 4-6 PCs in a D&D game but the number can very depending on how many people the DM wants to run the game for. As a PC you get to experience the world the DM built first hand. Whether that is through the eyes of a young farm girl picking up a sword for the first time or a disgruntled wizard who decides it is finally time to leave his tower after years of seclusion. As a PC in D&D you can try anything you could possibly imagine, whether or not you succeed is up to your creativity and a role of the dice.

So why not take the chance? Roll the dice? Experience a whole new world no one has ever seen before? Or build one all your own? If you have never played D&D before and I've sparked your interest or you are a lover of fantasy games and want to see where they got their start I recommend taking a look at Dungeons & Dragons. I can promise you its an experience like no other. So get off your computer for awhile, find some friends, grab some dice and let the adventure begin!

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Stay tuned for next month's theme