



REDISCOVERING THE NES

By September of 1996, the next generation of consoles was firmly established, and business was booming. The PlayStation had made gaming “cool” for the non-gaming world, and the Nintendo 64 had just arrived, causing quite a splash. Sega’s Saturn was still around, although it had now been pushed to a distant third. The other systems that had come along, attempting to become the new kings of the hill, had all pretty much fallen by the wayside at this point. Nearly gone were the 3DO, the CD-I and the Jaguar.

Did I care about any of these new systems? Not really. I had yet to see anything for the PlayStation or Nintendo 64 that made me sit up and say “I must have it!” There were a few good looking games for the Saturn that I had noticed, but not enough to make me want it. I was still happily playing my older systems.

Several months prior to the launch of the N64, though, an interesting change had occurred. My Atari 7800 was rarely getting played anymore. Neither was my NES. I was playing my Super NES, Genesis and TurboDuo almost exclusively. I would fire up the NES every so often for a game of *Gradius II* or *Castlevania*, but it was mostly collecting dust at this point. The 7800 stayed packed up in its box for months at a time. My Sega Master System games were gone at this point in time, as I had sold them and my Power Base Converter to Lars. It was a move I later regretted, and about a year later, Lars (who was never that thrilled with the Master System) agreed to sell them back to me.

Looking back on it, I think it was simply that I had gotten bored with both systems, quite possibly because I had played them so much during the past decade. Something I understand now, but didn’t then, was that I had to take a break from them for a while so they would seem fresh and new.

What ultimately renewed my love affair with the NES was an unexpected discovery. I had been hitting the local flea markets (Flea World in Sanford and the Daytona Flea Market in Daytona Beach) looking for new games for both systems. The problem was that most dealers in both places still were charging ten to twenty dollars apiece for NES carts, and most of the Atari games I did find were already in my possession. On top of that, nine times out of ten they were 2600 games; 7800 games seemed to be few and far between.

One day in mid-'96, I found myself having to stop at one of the local pawn shops while looking for an out-of-print CD, White Zombie's *Make Them Die Slowly*. I had searched all of the used record stores in the immediate area with no success.

They didn't have it, but rather than leaving in disappointment and heading to another store, I decided to have a look around and see if they had anything else to offer. Naturally, the first place I looked was the glass case they had their videogames locked up in. They had a decent selection of Genesis and Super NES games, but not a one that I was looking for.

Then my eyes fell on the NES games they had. There were stacks of them, and they weren't just sports titles or *Super Mario Bros./Duck Hunt* carts. Rather, there was an incredibly diverse selection, many which I didn't own but had rented in the past.

The price? Two dollars and fifty cents per game. That made me do a double take. Here I was used to twenty dollar price tags like at the flea market, and this pawn shop was selling them for a mere pittance in comparison.

I checked my wallet and determined that I could buy one of them if I still wanted to track down the White Zombie CD. That was fine, but which one would I get? I narrowed my choices down to the two games I wanted the most: *Blaster Master*, which I had played before and enjoyed, but hadn't seen in a few years, and *Bionic Commando*, which I had seen Braunle play many years before. I couldn't decide which I wanted, though.

Finally I just said "the hell with it" and got them both. I wouldn't be able to afford the CD until my next paycheck now, but since I couldn't find it anywhere, it wasn't a big deal. So I brought my new finds home and began to play them.

By the end of the day I was enjoying the NES again, more so than I had in a couple of years. I even pulled my old games out of storage and began playing them too. It felt like a renaissance to me, and I vowed to start hitting all of the pawn shops in the area looking for deals like the one I had stumbled across. My search for the CD was put on indefinite hold at this point. I did eventually find it, several years later, but that's another story (maybe for *Memoirs of a Metalhead*).

Over the next few weeks, my NES collection started to grow for the first time in years. Oddly, I overlooked the Goodwill stores completely, thinking that there was no way they'd have NES games (how wrong I was). Then the N64 was released and the pawn shops started to lower their prices on NES games even more, most likely so they could get rid of them and clear space for more PlayStation and N64 games. I was more than happy to take them off their hands.

As the next year and a half passed, I continued my hunt. The flea market dealers were finally starting to lower the prices on the majority of their NES games, with the exception of the most popular titles like *Super Mario Bros. 3* and *The Legend of Zelda*. By then, though, I had gotten most of the ones I wanted, and more often than not I was starting to run across the same titles that I already owned.

Then I hit a bonanza and a half. In early 1998, Video Plus was going out of business. As such, they were unloading all of their stock. Most of the games were boxed, and none of them were more than six dollars.



The games that reignited my interest in the NES.

Every Friday for almost two months I headed to Video Plus and walked out with anywhere from five to eight new games. Not only was I grabbing NES titles, but also Genesis and Turbograft-16 games (they were the only video store in the area that had the Turbo for rent). I scored at least one hard-to-find NES game during this time as well: Tengen's *Tetris*. They had a boxed copy which I picked up for six dollars, then turned around and traded for over **eighty** dollars in store credit at the Daytona Flea Market's Video Game Dungeon.

That was truly a great time to be collecting NES games. Nowadays you're lucky if you find **any** pawn shops that have them for sale, and you're even luckier if they aren't just copies of *Super Mario Bros./Duck Hunt* or sports games. Most of them don't even carry PlayStation titles anymore. The mom-n-pop video stores like Video Plus are almost completely extinct—hell, video stores themselves are nearly extinct, thanks to streaming services like Netflix and Amazon, as well as Redbox kiosks. Nowadays it seems we're limited to eBay, various online stores, and every so often, if you're lucky, an actual brick and mortar store, most of which are usually tucked away in flea markets or in that other dying American institution, the mall. Not only that, but these days most of the games are grossly overpriced. You can still find a few gems for five or six bucks apiece, but the rest of the good games are much pricier.

It was fun while it lasted.

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