

The State of Modern Gaming

An Observation by E. King

I had a thought today... One I have never had before. Should I sell my PS4 and Xbox One?

Some of you might think this is normal. That selling a console or two shouldn't come as a surprise. But, for me, it's a sign of something else. You see, I don't *sell* my consoles. I'm not just a gamer, but a fan of gaming in general. I still own the same Nintendo 64 console I had when I was three years old! So, why would the thought strike me to sell *two* of my current generation consoles? I think it's time to dive into the state of modern gaming...

The Console Problem

There is a word that describes my feelings with the current generation of consoles...

Underwhelming.

When I look back on the previous generations of gaming consoles, I see obvious marks of *innovation*. Remember that word? I remember being blown away by this little, purple box that played Mario and Zelda like I had never seen. All in a tiny cube I could throw in my backpack and take to my friend's house. I remember someone handing me a controller, and then proceeding to cross-map *snipe* me in this first-person shooter called Halo. I was so fascinated by the people who were *innovating* their games in the 3D space that I was excited! I truly was a Gamer.

And then, the next generation came. And for the first time, I thought "I don't see the difference..." Suddenly, instead of features, People were talking about *specifications*. Which console is faster and more powerful. The Xbox became a glorified media center, and tossed in gaming as an afterthought. The two consoles required you to install your games onto the system in order to allow publishers to pack in more data than a physical disc could handle, killing the plug and play aspect of consoles. I concede that I was blinded by all the hype for a new generation after the last one had lasted so long. Because I ended up owning both of them. I even had Nintendo's little console that couldn't, the Wii U.

The console market had become a strange world where being different was feared, and the company that was credited with single-handedly ending the console market crash of 1983 was struggling to sell their own console. Meanwhile, Sony and Microsoft were announcing re-releases of their current generation consoles that could handle higher resolutions and more power-hungry games, Shaking the security that your console could handle new games the same as old ones.

Innovation was dead...

The Same Games

I could take the last section, and just say “Ditto” for this one. Sony and Microsoft weren’t the only ones afraid of the “I” word.

Game publishers began looking at their products and saying “If it ain’t broke...” Call of Duty, Assassin’s Creed, Skyrim. These are all games that refused to change the formula, and for the former two, it nearly killed them. Bethesda’s Skyrim somehow became the shining example of how to sell the same game to the same people. Skyrim was a single game in a single series that was released no less than *eight different times!* And people continued to buy it! The gaming market stagnated, making the only worthwhile games re-releases of old classics.

Gamers were growing up. The people who were gamers over twenty years ago were itching for the same experiences they had as a child. They wanted nostalgia, and the market knew it. Remakes and classics flooded store shelves, flying away as fast as they were stocked.

Now, I feel I need a little disclaimer here. By no means am I saying that classic remakes and re-releases are a *bad* thing. I’ve enjoyed Master Chief Collection and the Super NES Classic more than ever. However, when the market has become nothing but, There’s something wrong. We, as gamers, needed something that the market wasn’t giving. Something *new!* In the past few months, I’ve spent more time playing my Nintendo 64, a console widely considered a *failure*, than I have spent playing any *new* console. Well, aside from one, but that’s not important now. Even my custom built computer is wasted on nothing but YouTube and Reddit arguments.

The Bad, the Worse, and the Ugly

Remember the last section, when I described publisher’s saying “If it ain’t broke...”? Turns out, a lot of the games of the era were, in fact, broken.

I don’t remember accidentally falling through the map in Ocarina of Time, or seeing NPCs teleport around like a demented pinball in Halo. Yet some of the most anticipated AAA titles do just that on a regular basis! Why should I have to restart from a checkpoint because the exit to a room bugged out on me? Hell, why do I have to dodge around holes in the game’s code just to have a standard experience?! And we praise some of these games! When the Game of the Year feels like a beta, I have to ask, when was subpar quality deemed acceptable? When will publishers stop charging us for an incomplete experience?

And then.... Microtransactions!

Most of you should remember the fallout that publisher Electronic Arts was subjected to after announcing their microtransaction model for Star Wars Battlefront II. The model essentially gave players an edge for purchasing randomized loot crates from the in-game store. The “pay to win” scenario was subject to so much backlash that Disney threatened to pull the license to the Star Wars brand. Eventually, EA caved and removed the ability to purchase crates with real money.

This is the introduction for why microtransactions can ruin a game, and is one of the newest issues to hit the gaming community. Mostly, the pay to win model appears in mobile gaming, since that's a market with mostly cheap, or free games. However, Battlefront II is an example of this model making its way to mainstream gaming.

The EA debacle is also an example of how companies are learning to take more and more money from us. Sometimes, in the excitement of being a fan, we forget that these games come from large corporations that want nothing more than to take our money.

The Future

We gamers seem to be surrounded on all sides by large corporations that are trying to find ways to make us pay up for the least amount of effort possible. I misspoke when I said that companies are *afraid* of innovation. They'd rather make you pay for the same thing over and over than spend money on innovation.

We've seen console competitors slow the development of better hardware. Creators would rather brush on a new coat of paint than create something genuinely new. And we pay up for bits and pieces of an experience. We live in a world where companies don't see something we can legitimately enjoy. They just see dollar signs. This is a Dark Age of gaming we've fallen into.

But...

I'd like to believe we are at the end of that age rather than the beginning. I think us gamers still have a voice in a world that is trying to silence us. We stood up and made ourselves heard to EA. We told them that we would *not* endure their rules. And we won out over them!

The stagnation that had plagued the gaming market is being torn down by the explosion of indie games from small developers that are willing to make the games that the larger companies won't, along with E3 2017, where we finally saw AAA titles that are new and exciting and unexpected.

Then, there's the company that everyone thought was doomed in the console market. It seems that the failure of the Wii U has given Nintendo a lot to think about, because their Switch has put them back on the map. The little tablet has managed to even dethrone the PS4 in month to month sales, proving that you don't need raw power to make a good console. This was followed by the wave of third-party developers swarming Nintendo just to put games on their console. Add to that the slew of first-party games like Mario Odyssey and Zelda: Breath of the Wild, and maybe this tiny console can tell it's competitors what we've been trying to say all along! That we want something *new*!

We want *innovation*...