SPECIAL FEATURE



With Ultra 64 set for release in just a few months' time, NMS begins a four-part history of Nintendo to prove there is no doubt that, by this time next year, the only name on the minds of games players the world over will be Nintendo.

You may have noticed that some magazines have begun to question Nintendo's reputation of late. This has mainly been brought about through competitors having released more 'up-to-date' machines while Nintendo have been content to quietly bide their time. Of course this kind of attitude raises many questions: Surely Nintendo must be worried? Perhaps they have fallen behind, or lost touch? In the face of such impressive competition shouldn't Nintendo release something; anything to retain their hold on such a fast-moving market? How can one company, however powerful, be so arrogant as to regard developments from major-league rivals with just a polite acknowledgement of their recent 'state-of-the-art' machines – and then confidently expect to generate excitement with the odd-ball Virtual Boy? The truth is Nintendo know something these other companies don't. In fact Nintendo is a company which invariably proves it knows the best part of everything when it comes to producing the best in video games.

THE HISTOR

IN FOUR PARTS PART ONE - YOUR DEA



FLOWER POWER

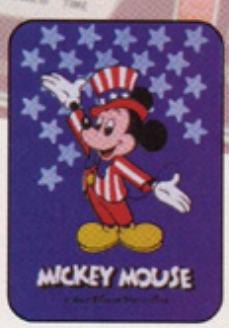
Nintendo have probably had more to do with entertainment in your lifetime than you think. You could even be as old as 107 and still have some memory of them because the founder, Fusajiro Yamauchi, set out to earn his living from producing hand-made playing cards way back in September 1889!

In 1950 Fusajiro's great-grandson, Hiroshi Yamauchi, took over what was then a fully established playing card manufacturer: 'Nintendo Playing Card Co, Ltd'. It's fair to say that without Hiroshi Yamauchi's involvement from this point onward, Nintendo's future would not have become half so incredible. Hiroshi instigated the mass-production of Japan's first plastic-coated playing cards in 1953 and six years later, having established an excellent reputation, secured a licensing agreement with Walt Disney to use their characters on cards. By January 1962 both the Osaka and Kyoto Stock Exchange had the new company listed in their second section, basically indicating that Nintendo Playing Card Co, Ltd were starting to play a pretty mean hand.

By 1963, despite his success, Hiroshi apparently became dissatisfied with Nintendo Playing Card Company Limited – limited being the operative word here – because he made a final, calculated name-change to 'Nintendo Co Ltd', allowing him to take his company into practically any area of home entertainment he wished. And he wasted no time at all.







HANAFUDA - "FLOWER CARDS"

1889

There are many variations on the Hanafuda, or "flower card" , theme in Japan. Whereas most Western cards use a combination of pictures and numbers for identification and are sold in four suits of twelve, Hanafuda rely purely on image association and come in twelve suits of four. So, in place of Jacks, Kings and Queens, the more popular Hanafuda decks have floral designs or depict seasons of the year. Fusajiro Yamauchi made certain his cards were of the highest quality, ensuring that the biggest card players in the Kyoto region would play with nothing else. As real pros resolutely begin each new game with a fresh deck, Yamauchi soon made himself a fortune!

NIN-TEN-DO

The name Nintendo is composed of three Japanese kanji characters which together mean "Work hard, but in the end it is in heaven's hands." This is the most popular translation, however "Leave luck to heaven" and "Deep in the mind we have to do whatever we have to do" are also accepted.

WALT DISNEY PLAYING CARDS

1953

From the offset, Hiroshi Yamauchi showed determination to make Nintendo a household name. By obtaining the Walt Disney license he was guaranteed television advertising and a product which appealed to a broader audience – including thousands of Disney-crazed kids. Being associated with such a respected name in the entertainment industry is an invaluable recommendation too.

OF NINTENDO





ULTRA HAND

1969

Either by accident or design, Nintendo chose to prefix the name of their next big venture into exciting new territory with the word Ultra – the same one given to the range of products launched by Nintendo as the company's first venture into the world of toys. 'Ultra Hand' became the first in a line of three to carry the Nintendo name; the other two being 'Ultra Scope', which was a kind of periscope, and a baseball pitching machine called 'Ultra Machine'. You might guess that the inventor of these extraordinary gadgets is none other than Gunpei Yokoi, who later went on to head development for both the Game Boy and Virtual Boy hardware.

LOVE TESTER

1973

You have to remember that pretty much any form of electronic entertainment in the early 70s was considered amazing. So when gullible, 'loving' couples found they could to test their combined passion simply by clutching the handles of this strange gadget the 'Love Tester' became an instant hit. Europe and America got the best deal though, where the English instructions dictated that a good old snog would complete the lu-urve circuit. Cool

BEAM GUN

1970

Some of us here at NMS are old enough to remember a game called 'Tin Can Alley' – a toy shooting-range in which fake cans are blown away by a beam of light 'shot' from a plastic gun. In Japan they had targets such as a Lion's head (pictured here) and beer bottles too. Though the idea was partly due to Gunpei Yokoi it was his new partner, Masayuki Uemura, who made the most significant contribution. The technology used in the Beam Gun was a clever adaptation of Sharp's solar cell battery, and Mr Uemura had recently left that company. Nintendo used the cells as light-sensitive targets and christened their invention 'opto-electronics'. Nintendo became the first company in the world to produce electronic toys for sale in Japan.



SPECIAL FEATURE



LASER CLAY

1973

Following the success of the Beam Gun range, Gunpei Yokoi discussed the possibility of an entire, indoor shooting range with his boss Hiroshi Yamauchi. They arrived at an idea that took advantage of adapting disused bowling alleys to house the first ever opto-electronic Laser Clay Range. Though eventually a major success, the opening day was a different story. An engineer hired especially for the project, Genyo Takeda, came to the rescue when the whole set-up went hay wire; in front of television news crews there to cover the launch! As a desperate measure Genyo snook behind the scenes to run everything manually; a gambit which paid off as nobody suspected a thing! One year later a live-footage variation on the Laser Clay theme, "Wild Gunman", emerged using a 16-mm projection of said maniac in much the same way as the recent CD-Rom driven Mad Dog McCree coin-operates. This is a fine example of Nintendo's uncanny ability to forsee and create markets that other companies struggle to imagine.



"The Nintendo Way of adapting Technology is not to look for state of the art but to utilise mature technology that can be mass-produced cheaply."

Gunpei Yokoi, head of R&D 1 at Nintendo Company Limited. Taken from 'Game Over' by David Sheff.

COLOR TV GAME 6

1977

Due to circumstances beyond their control, and ones that are far too boring to print here, Nintendo looked set to face financial problems in the mid-seventies. At that time Atari were going strong with their VCS system in America, alongside a rather more basic system by Magnavox which, despite offering no more than tragic-looking Pong variants, sold comparably well. Nintendo chose to license the Magnavox machine for sale in Japan, later collaborating with Mitsubishi in order to produce circuit boards more efficiently. Though it helped keep Hiroshi Yamauchi's concern in business, it was far from what he had in mind. It was nothing to be proud of. However it did provide and insight into an area where Nintendo could place its stamp of authority at a later date, and Hiroshi instructed his best engineers to create something worthy of the company's innovative reputation.



(ABOVE) It's Hiroshi Yamauchi, boss of Nintendo. Bow feeble mortals!

GAME & WATCH

1980

Until Game & Watch the most fun you could have with a hand-held computer was a calculator, but squeezing the words hELLO, 800b5 and 5hELL OIL from LCD digits gets boring after a while. No wonder the world welcomed Game & Watch! The first ever Game & Watch was named 'Ball' – the juggling game featured on the recent Game Boy Gallery cart. Like all Game & Watches, Ball had two functions: a simple game, controlled using just two buttons, and a clock/ alarm. At the back of the unit there was a retractable stand which enabled the gadget to be propped up on a bedside cabinet, and some of us here at NMS remember spending many late nights taking one or another of the Game & Watches 'around the clock'.

With Game & Watch Nintendo demonstrated for the first time that they were not about succeeding off the backs of other peoples' efforts. They had a pretty good idea of how things ought to be for themselves. Nobody could have predicted this clever piece of miniature hardware but the success of Game & Watch was barely a hint of what was to come...

SPECIAL FEATURE



NEXT MONTH IN PART TWO

Nintendo venture into the arcades with Donkey Kong, the Famicom (NES in the West) is launched to disbelieving eyes and Super Mario becomes more popular than Mickey Mouse!



JIM CARREY JEFF DANIELS

DUMB AND DUMBER

12

FOR HARRY AND LLOYD EVERY DAY IS A NO-BRAINER.



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