

Your Friendly Neighborhood Game Connoisseur

So who am I? I've been playing games my entire life. I am what many people would call a "gamer." I like to know what the latest games are, and chances are I've played them. Over my lifetime I've played just about every game I've had the chance to. I've played on sports teams, played board games as a kid, play board games with my kids, been in poker card tournaments, played pinball, darts, and video games. I have developed my own board games and video games, and generally if I have the chance to play a game I will.

In terms of video games, you might even say I am part of the world's first ever generation of video gamer. You see, as a gamer I cut my teeth on the *Pong* home entertainment system in the late 70s. I have owned nearly every major home entertainment system since then, including *Atari*, *Nintendo*, *Genesis*, *Super Nintendo*, *Playstation*, *Dreamcast*, *Nintendo 64*, *Nintendo Gamecube*, and *Xbox 360*. And I'm not just a console gamer, but a computer gamer as well. Overall, I have played as many or more video games than anyone I know, including most of my friends who I would also consider "gamers." Now, as a Professor at SUNY Potsdam, I help my students to better understand games. I teach some students to develop games, and other students how to use games to improve teaching and learning. You could fairly say that both my personal and professional life is surrounded and enveloped by games.

So why am I telling you this? Well, since this is my first of many monthly columns about games that I will write for *Fourth Coast Entertainment* I thought you might like to know a little bit about me and the perspective I bring. Maybe the best way to understand me is with an analogy. I am to games as a connoisseur is to wine. With wines, it is nice to know that the person giving you advice has tried a lot of different wines, knows what the latest wines are, and has some deep personal history with wine. The connoisseur needs to know the good bargains, the rip-offs, which age well, and ultimately which are bad and which are good. Games are in many ways very similar to wine. Especially if you are not an avid gamer or wine drinker, you need to know which will appeal to you when you buy the odd bottle. Also like drinking wine, some people play games every day, some play every once in a while, and some play very rarely. In both cases people play games and drink because they *enjoy* it. So that's where I come in. You can think of me as your friendly neighborhood *Game Connoisseur*.

Since *Fourth Coast Entertainment* is a monthly newspaper, I'll be telling you about what I think are the best or most unique things going on with games. Some months I'll tell you about the latest, greatest video game, in other months I'll tell you about the board game that I picked up and started playing with my kids, and in others I'll talk about the latest local dart league. In one sense you might think of this as a monthly diary entry about the game(s) I am currently playing. Because I am a family-man (children 8, 6, and 3, nieces 4 and 2), the games I play all have to have be family friendly. I don't have the time to hole myself up in a room by myself for hours, away from my family. If I play a game, it has to be something that my friends and family can play with me. To put it another way, for me playing a game should not *take away* from the quality time I spend with my friends and

family, it should *add* to it. In all of my articles I'll be focusing on games as entertainment for you, your friends, and your family. And as with wine, if enjoyed moderately and responsibly, games can be a positive influence on your life.

So, to start things off, I'd love to hear from you, the reader. What games are you playing this month? And especially, which games have you been playing that have brought you closer to your friends and family? Send me an e-mail and let me know what you've been up to, you might even see it show up in next month's column.

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You can contact Dr. Betrus with questions you have about games, things you'd like to see covered in future columns, or just to tell him which games you've been playing.