According to Harris B.J, “The next big console war is what defines a generation of gaming.” While consumers decide what games look the best and what consoles they should pick up for the holiday season, the companies themselves battle against each other to compete for the best with targeted strategies and advertising to snuff out their competition. Many console wars have been fought over the years and are still being fought to this day, but the most influential console wars were fought between Nintendo and Sega in the 1900s. A battle between Two absolute titans hitting the scene at a time where home gaming wasn’t the abundant market it is today.

The great console wars, as they’re called today began with the expansion of a small company called Sega into the console market and ended with that self same companies’ retreat from console manufacture. The story of Sega is pivotal to knowing the story of the Great Console Wars.

Sega started out as a big contender in arcade games in the late 90s, known for fast paced racing titles and inventive experiences such as Space Harrier, they became huge contenders in the arcade industry, one that was unfortunately starting to die out due to the worldwide release of home consoles by companies like Atari and Nintendo. Sega’s start was long and bumpy with consoles like the SG-1000 and the Master system in the US, and with their desperate times due to the success of the NES, Sega had no choice but to invest all their effort into their next big console, using whatever resources they could gather from other divisions such as their arcade industry, they created the console that would start the war and truly put them on the map, the Sega Genesis. With the snarky tagline “genesis does what Nintendon’t” and the most “edgy” mascot to date, Sonic the Hedgehog, along with their cutting-edge 16-bit games, the Sega Genesis finally showed Nintendo and the rest of the world that there were now two major competitors in the realm of console gaming, and neither one of them were to be trifled with.

When people mention the most iconic video game characters, they can’t help but mention Sonic the Hedgehog, a character born out of the Great Console Wars. Sonic was a character created by Sega specifically to combat Nintendo’s iconic mascot, Super Mario. And in the eyes of many, including Sega themselves, he succeeded in his mission. Due to the genius blend of rad music with the amazing graphics of the Sega Genesis and the fast yet smooth gameplay of the original Sonic the Hedgehog, the Genesis was a huge hit, selling over 30 million units worldwide, and rivaled anything Nintendo had on the market at that time. A bold strategy of tying in the original Sonic the Hedgehog in with the console helped propel it through launch and the new Sonic games released throughout the next few years kept it alive until the release of Nintendo’s newest console, the SNES. The SNES was an excellent contender to the genesis and fought well against it for a couple years, but then things got interesting.

A new contender came up to the stand while Sega had recently cobbled together it’s Sega Saturn, a console doomed for failure due to its’ less powerful hardware and lackluster software, Sony and their first version of the Playstation. Sega’s inventie new console was dwarfed by the sheer power of the Playstation due to incredibly unlucky timing of console release, and Sega fell to desperation with the walls quickly closing in on them in the console market. The playstation would go on to defeat the Nintendo 64, one of the most loved consoles of all time, and the second Playstation would go on to become the greatest selling console of all time, selling over 150 million units worldwide and putting Sony firmly on top in the ongoing wars. With Sony holding a commanding lead and Nintendo holding on tight, Sega had all but lost the war, they needed a miracle to put them back on track, and some people would say the Dreamcast could have been that miracle, boasting ingenuity in its’ online network and 3d software such as the two Sonic Adventure games(some of my favorite games of all time) but the reality is that the Dreamcast, as powerful as it was just couldn’t save Sega from its’ situation. Sega had to stop console production, and be reduced to a third party seller in the new triangle that had formed in the console race. Nintendo, their old rivals, Sony, their killers, and Microsoft, a new group of upstarts whose resources and Xbox system brought them into the race in Sega’s absence. Sega brought in a new audience of gamers, players, and business competitors that created the highly competitive and industrious market we know today.

The console wars created one thing that can’t be said for the consoles of today, truly fierce competition, and that competition was the source of unbelievable innovation on the part of the winners, Sony and Nintendo. Nintendo created new ways to play such as the groundbreaking 3d graphics of the N64 and it’s highly innovative games that people love to this day, such as: Super Mario 64, The console’s top selling game, Banjo Kazooie, a game still loved by thousands of people for it’s open world in a time of more constricting level-based gameplay as well its charm. This period also marked the beginning of Nintendo’s trump card, and one of my favorite games of all time, Super Smash Brothers, a series that takes all the Nintendo characters and puts them all into one convenient package, tightly wrapped up in the bow of one of the most inventive and unique fighting gameplay of any fighting game I’ve ever played. But knowing this, It’s really hard to remember that Nintendo wasn’t the one that won in the end, it was Sony and their Playstation line, a console chain so strong that people today still argue whether or not Sony is winning a separate console war between the Playstation 4 and the Xbox One, and that result is yet to be seen.

Sony’s original Playstation launched with the creation of a new way of storing information on a CD that is still used(in an upgraded form) today. The Playstation was a very powerful console for its time and had an unbelievable amount of support by third party software as well as a very impressive lineup of games that blew the Nintendo 64 out of the water. The console was backed by Square Enix, a company now known for creating one of the most loved franchises in history in Final Fantasy, and what’s widely regarded as their best game came out on the PS1 in the heat of the console war, Final Fantasy 7. Known for its unbelievable story, glorious pre rendered cutscenes and some of the best RPG gameplay of the time, there was no way the Playstation could fail. Follow that up with the next two games in the series years later that had more of a niche fanbase but still a major following, and it proves that Sony had the guts and the support they needed to create some of the best games of all time, especially when placed in the midst of the greatest source of publicity in the late 90s to early 2000s.

And speaking of publicity, the competition of the console wars was one of the greatest breeding grounds for advertising in history. I only briefly touched upon the Genesis does what Nintendon’t slogan of the earliest parts of the war, but every company had their own tactics to bring in as many new audiences and new players as possible, and man was there a reception. According to Ethan Tussey of the Critical Commons Archive, “Gamers started to identify(or be identified by their rivals) as either Nintendo or Sega Fanboys or Fangirls.” This changing of identity really allowed for the broadening of a demographic because people chose a side, people described to their friends, their families, to everyone, about why a certain console was the best compared to the competition, and why they should be on board with the company that made that console. The question changed from “what’s the best game I can get.” to “what’s the new game that’s being made by x company” and while this may seem like more of a negative switch I see it as people reaching out and trying new experiences that seem different to your tastes because of your faith in a company. My best example of this would be when I tried out a Fire emblem game(Fire Emblem Awakening specifically) which I would never have tried if Roy and Marth weren’t characters in Super Smash Brothers Melee and Nintendo didn’t make the game. (Btw, Fire emblem is now one of my favorite series of all time, so in my opinion, trust in something new and you’ll be rewarded.) Companies flourished under all this new attention, and new masterpieces were brought into the limelight for all to enjoy.

By competing against each other, Nintendo and Sega managed to inadvertently create a more unified community down the line, a community of gamers with faith in the big guys and who are willing to reach out and try new experiences when they are presented, such as the huge wave of indie games that succeed as multiplatform. Gaming as a whole has had a huge increase in quality with a culture of one-upping as well, and as much as competition breaks down the little guy, equal competition brings out the best in any field. So let’s all say our prayers to the lost Sega, as we all hold our heads high as the next generation of gamers.