

Dear Atari 2600,

Computer technology began in 1980 (at least for me). That was the year you arrived: a black plastic wedge trimmed in stylish wood grain. You came with a game cartridge labeled *Combat* that slid home with a satisfying thunk. It sounded like the future. A flip of a switch revealed a pixelated battlefield on my small black-and-white TV. Suddenly I was an 11-year-old tank commander. My new joystick squeaked as I pushed a button to fire a test round and then rolled off for an afternoon of high-tech warfare.

That afternoon never really ended. Despite the many charms of Tank Pong, *Combat* eventually gave way to *Pitfall!* I controlled a character who ran through the jungle picking up treasures and using vines to swing over crocodile-stocked pools. The game called him Harry, but I knew he was Indiana Jones. Scratch that: *I* was Indiana Jones.

Every game advanced my education. My bumbling career as Officer Kelly in *Keystone Kapers* showed me that crime sometimes does pay. My high scores in *Missile Command* made me an early supporter of missile defense. And I aced driver's ed thanks to hours of fevered practice in *Night Driver*.

Some of my friends took up with your rival, the Intellivision. Don't take this personally, but there was a certain surface attraction: better graphics, better graphics, and spokesman George Plimpton's arch putdowns of your clunky graphics. But for all its slickness, the Intellivision didn't have *Adventure*.

The \$25 I paid for the swords-and-sorcery game was the best investment I've ever made. True, my character—a lowly square—would make Plimpton snort in his scotch. But what I lacked in style I made up for in substance. Speeding through castles and mazes, I picked up swords and dispatched the dragon trio of Rhindle, Yorgle, and Grundle. I even collected the dot that revealed the video game world's first-ever secret message: "Created by Warren Robinett." I learned to live by wit, courage, and a dash of whimsy. I grew up on adventure.

After I left for college, you wound up in a storeroom for two decades. Then a few weeks ago, my mother brought you over in a box. Feeling a little like Indiana Jones again, I opened the lid and lifted you out. I toggled your familiar switches and wondered if I could hook you up to my TV. In the end I decided to let you stay retired. I was now the grown-up I had wanted to be.



Love, Brad

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