I think it happens to most Atari VCS aficionados — and probably those for its contemporaries — that when they are hanging out with other friends into video games, they want to try and introduce these newcomers to their system of choice. But putting nostalgia aside, the system has a lot of games that have aged poorly for modern sensibilities.

It's not a complete lost cause, however. Considering the VCS is a system with hundreds of games released officially for some 13 years, most people can find at least a few games that strike their fancy — it's just a matter of picking out those titles before they experience something that is decidedly dated or poor to begin with.

I had this same experience fairly recently — a lifelong gaming friend of mine had never sat down with Atari's machine before, and after trying some random games like Worm War I and Demons to Diamonds, was wholly unimpressed and disinterested. She was willing to give it another chance, however, provided I could curate some games of interest to her.

Grabbing some of the instant classics off the shelf is a good start. Something from the system's cream of the crop, like Ms. Pac-Man, Jr. Pac-Man, H.E.R.O., or River Raid can typically pique someone's interest, but you may need a bit more to really grab them.

Consider your friend's personality and gaming tastes. My friend enjoys games with weird premises, food items, or cutesy characters, and I was able to interest her in titles like Oink, Pengo, Kool-Aid Man, and Fast Food.

As far as genres go, the VCS is certainly not known for character-based platformers, but Crystal Castles and the Pitfall games are pretty decent starts. And if your friend enjoys shootemups, something like Gyruss, Beamrider, or Seaquest may do well for you. The only major deficiencies for the system are RPGs and puzzle games, though Starpath may have you decently covered, depending on the person.

Late release games are a good consideration for people who grew up in the NES era, too. A game like Secret Quest or Solaris may not be as refined and sizable as an NES game, but the complexity in those titles may be enough to hook someone on them; they may just not be the best titles to start new players off with.

Finally, consider homebrew games as a great launching point! These are not only technical marvels in their own right, but many of them are building off of decades of game design knowledge and a lack of deadlines/money limitations that older programmers contended with.

On the flip side, I would be wary of bringing in the earliest Atari releases or the weaker games in the library. Sure, Combat may be a two-player clas- sic — and two player games are a good way to go in general — but something like Air Sea Battle, or Canyon Bomber? You probably won't gain too many fans with those. Even if a game is something you enjoy, be aware that you may just dig it because of nostalgia, or because you're a fan of that specific genre. I love Sky Diver, but I'd hesitate to introduce someone to Atari with it unless that person is five.

With that in mind, I believe the VCS is a good fit for someone interested in the current mobile gaming market, as the system has a lot of simple games meant to only be played for short bursts. If you're trying to bring in someone who likes those experiences, your options definitely open up.

The VCS's library is a tricky one for people to settle into who didn't start playing until after it's heyday, but it remains a place full of fascinating, if comparatively primitive, games to dig up. With a bit of luck and skill, perhaps you can turn a friend into a spelunking partner.