

TOMORROW'S HEROES RETROGAMING TIMES

The Newsletter for the Retro Gamer in All of Us

July 1998

RETROTIMES #11

Introduction

Good, good, good eleven...never gave me any trouble until after nine! Excuse me, just humming an old School House Rocks song. Welcome to the eleventh issue of Retrogaming Times (or Retro Times for the shortened version). Once again we will take a long hard look at the video game world and all that it entails. We will see the joy, the sadness, the broken joysticks and remember that at the end of the day, they are still just games (my very lame attempt at a Pulitzer). Enough melodrama, let's get to the games! Quick note: If you enjoy a particular article from one of the contributors, please email them and let them know. Everyone loves email!

It is a Game, no it's a Cartoon!

To this day, I still remember the first time I saw Dragon's Lair. I remember my friend Ed, telling me about this new game at the arcade that looked just like a cartoon. Of course, I was a bit skeptical. I mean the Colecovision used to brag that Smurfs was like playing a Saturday morning cartoon and we all know that was an exaggeration. But I went to see this new marvel of a game. As we entered the Pleasure Time Arcade, I was stunned! For one of the only times in my life, I was truly speechless. There it was, right at the front of the arcade. Not only was it there, but they had a television set up on top, so you could watch the game in progress. Ed wasn't lying, it really was like a cartoon! There was Dirk the Daring in all his glory and I was totally mesmerized by it all. There was a crowd standing around the machine, all waiting for a chance to play.

Later in the day, I was finally able to play this game. I stuck in my two quarters (yes, it was twice the price of any other game) and began to play. A quick scan of the directions told me all I needed to know. Within a few minutes, I had lost my first guy. The second was lost soon after. I soon learned that while the graphics were incredible, the gameplay left something to be desired. To put it mildly, the gameplay stunk. It was just a bunch of memorization, nothing more and nothing less. But to see the next sequence was enough to keep me trying. It was like going to a Disney cartoon and you have to keep paying to see the next part of it. I must admit that Princess Daphne was a looker and just wanting to save her was almost reason enough to play.

Well, I did finally beat them game, many tries and quarters later. My friend Ed finished much sooner and became somewhat of a legend around the arcade as he was one of the first to defeat it (he also could do a Rubik's Cube in about a minute). While the gameplay is still nothing to write home about, I can still remember the day when I began to dream about what games could really look like and suddenly all the other games lost a little luster.



THE MANY FACES OF....PITFALL II

Since Pitfall was done in last month's issue, it makes logical sense to review its sequel in the following issue. Pitfall II: The Lost Caverns can be found on three different classic systems, Atari 2600, Atari 5200, and Colecovision. In my opinion, this is one of the best games from the classic era. It shared a lot from its predecessor in that you were the same character running around dodging obstacles and collecting treasure. But Pitfall II has a lot more to it than that. It has rivers, frogs, condors, and balloons just to mention a few. But what really distinguishes this game from most other classic games is that it had an ending. Unlike most other classic games where you only try again and again to beat that high score, this game has you coming back again and again trying to finish the darn game.

Bronze Medal -- Colecovision

It doesn't make any sense that this version gets the bronze. The Colecovision blows the Atari 2600 away when comparing the two from a hardware perspective, but for some unknown reason this game was not able to shine on this system. It seems like it was rushed. Play is not smooth and somewhat flaky. For example, the bats and condors move in a bumpy fashion and if you have played this game before on any system you know how frustrating it is trying to time them. But what really irks me about this version is when you die, it takes forever to get back to the starting point! You die and then you wait 10 minutes to return to where you last started...it makes death so much more irritating! The Colecovision seems to get bashed every month in this feature. I have nothing against the Colecovision in general, in fact I love it, but I seldom use it for Pitfall or Pitfall II.

Silver Medal -- Atari 2600

Before I begin, let me share a quick story. Back in the day, I first played Pitfall II on my Atari 2600 when my babysitter brought his cartridge over one night. I loved it so much: The music, the treasures, the challenge! I played it until bedtime. I always asked my parents to get this guy to babysit so I could play Pitfall II. Well, the one time he babysat and he again brought it. I was sad to go to bed, because I knew I was through playing it, but when I woke up the next morning, it was still there in the 2600...he forgot it!! Needless to say, I played it all day, and the next day, and the next day, etc. until I finally finished it. I'll never forget the excitement I had. 15 years later, I found this game at a flea market and relived that excitement. Anyway, the 2600 version is good. Play is smooth, the music is charming, even the label on the cartridge is cool. I don't think it's possible to put much more into an Atari 2600 game.

Gold Medal -- Atari 5200

Yes, even though the Atari 2600 version was highly praised, this version is simply the best. Even the 5200 controllers don't keep this one from praise. Not only is it the best graphically and audibly, but it has a whole other world attached onto it that can't be found on any other system (except Atari computers). And if you thought the regular

caverns were difficult, try these out: they are tough! I didn't know about this until I got back into classic gaming, and I was dying to see what this world was like. I still haven't completed it yet. (Although I don't have the same amount of time and patience I did when I was 10). Hats off to those that have and hats off to this game, get it if you don't have it.

(Doug Saxon is an engineering student at the University of Cincinnati. He's mainly into 2600, 5200, Colecovision, and Intellivision. He's also a proud owner of a mint Chase the Chuckwagon cartridge which set him back \$1. He can be reached via email at saxondj@email.uc.edu)

MAME REVIEWS

Once again, I am reviewing two games that are enhanced by using two joysticks. While these aren't classics like I reviewed last month (Robotron and Crazy Climber), they are still fun games to play. So enjoy them!



WACKO

This is one of those odd little games that plays so much better with a V-Stick. Much like Robotron, you can move and shoot in different directions. While this game is easier to play than Robotron when you only have one joystick, it is still harder.

The game revolves around an alien who has to fly around in his kroozer and zap creatures. There are all kinds of creatures and by zapping two of the same creature in consecutive shots, you will eliminate them. But if you shoot one type of creature and then another, you won't do anything (at least on the early levels). You will know when you hit a creature as it will shake uncontrollably. But on later levels if you shoot one creature and then another type, you will blend the two creatures into a real monstrosity. While this looks neat, it makes for some real headaches.

To make your life even tougher, on the higher levels the monsters turn into itty bitty creatures. These creatures cannot be killed until all the big monsters are zapped and then you can go on a hunt. But, instead of having to chase these pint sized terrors down, they will come after you. Smaller size does not mean smaller problems as they are quite fast and vicious.

The graphics are very large and colorful with a wide assortment of monster. Your little alien is kinda cute and his ship is small and sleek. The game is an addictive little romp that will keep you busy from time to time.



SPACE DUNGEON

This was one of the games that made it difficult to get rid of the Atari 5200. I really enjoyed it and especially that it was a dual joystick game (along with Robotron the only other dual joystick game on the 5200). When I saw it was on MAME, I was shocked! I didn't know it originally was an arcade game. So now I easily got over that lingering feeling of despair because that game along with the best version of Star Trek on the home consoles was lost to me.

Space Dungeon has your ship flying through a dungeon of sorts, looking for treasures to boost your end of the level bonus. Much like Robotron, you move with one joystick and shoot with the other. It takes a bit to get used to as you are moving from room to room, but once you do, it is very effective. No more having to turn around in order to shoot an enemy. Speaking of enemies, there are lots of them moving around. Some shoot at you and some, like the thief will just annoy you. There are some that need multiple shots to kill and others that take just one well placed shot.

Part of the fun of the game is looking up on the map and seeing what sections of the dungeon you have yet to explore. I like to try and conquer the whole level before moving on, but you can complete as little or as much as you like. It really is up to you. But be warned as if you die, all your treasure is left in that room and you must go and recover it. Can be a bit of a bummer if it is way in the corner and the way out is in the other direction.

One tough element of the game is that the enemy don't just sit there and wait. If you enter a room, they are coming after you. Even more exciting is if you run away, some of them will chase you. Plus, others will come from other rooms to join in the battle. We are talking a dungeon full of battle crazed ships. There is no welcome mat in this place.

It is a game that takes some reflexes to get used to the dual controllers, but if you can do Robotron, you can do this. The action is also fast paced and keeps you moving. While you can run away from your enemies, unlike Robotron, the moment of rest will be fleeting. It is only a matter of time before the Space Dungeon engulfs you. Bwahahahaha!

Confessions of a Gaming Fanatic

It all started when I happened to go to the bowling alley with my aunt one day. I was about 7 years old and saw a game called Pong. The bowling alley had pinball machines for a long time but this was something new, Whoa, a game you could play on TV. I still remember my first look at it, a cocktail model that sat next to the ball polisher. I played it all night and could not wait till next week to go back there!!

Not too long after that they got a game called Space Invaders. This was like 10 times more advanced than Pong, I started to play it all the time, then another game showed up and another. Before long the empty part of the bowling alley was an

arcade. I spent all summer there.

Christmas that year was great, a Coleco pong of my own!! I could play the game that I loved so much at home now. I bugged everyone in the house to play all the time. The next year (I think) was another special time for me, an Odyssey 2 as a present. I loved it!! Some friends down the street had an Atari and we would walk back and forth to play all the games we had. We also would walk the alleys and pick up pop bottles to take to the store to play the games they had there, Asteroids and another.

All thru my teen years I "hung out" at the bowling alley/ arcade. I got quite good at several of the games. I could always play Robotron well and later on I would draw a crowd for Gadius. I was the first person to go through the whole game.

I've had the game systems that were popular thru the years, but just kind of played them once in a while. I had gotten out of games for a few years, then a friend gave me her C=64 and a bunch of disks to play. That sparked the fire again. Now after three years of collecting my "childhood memories" I'm up to 38 systems and 600 plus games. Guess you could say that I love them! Its a great hobby and I hope that I never lose the fire again.

(Rayth Orlea is 31 and lives in Danville Il, where he drive a bus for mentally handicapped people. He have several reptiles, and also collect arcade machines. He would like to get into some part of the game industry. You can email him at Repti3@aol.com or visit his web site at <http://www.geocities.com/timessquare/labyrinth/6694>)

Flashback Time

Ever since I've been asked to contribute to this fine newsletter again, I began to wrack my brain for some topics. So I began to think back to some of my classic game memories.

I remember...

(everything goes fuzzy)

... spending a fortune of my hard-earned paper-route money on a Pong-like unit. (Hey \$69.95 was a lot of money !) It came complete with a gun that could be a pistol or a rifle depending on the barrel or stock you attached to it. The skeet-shoot and target games became less interesting when we discovered that you could get a perfect score just by shooting at a light bulb.

(fuzzy again)

... playing Galaxian at the shore after I graduated high school. We had rented a place for a week and it was too cold to swim. We had never seen this game before, but it seemed a lot like Space Invaders, but better. I played it so much that when I closed my eyes, I could still see those little buggers rolling out from formation and trapping me in the corner.

(fuzzy again, but a little swirly too)

... fourth grade intramural bowling at Garden Spot Lanes. After we'd finish bowling, we'd play pinball and (what passed for) video games until the bus arrived to take us home. I don't remember the exact games, but they had a Super Sprint style game. It was a 1-player black and white unit. We found that if you shuffled your feet across the carpet and touched the area around the coin-slot with a dime, you got a free game. After that discovery, we didn't play anything else. I don't think the game was there for too much longer.

(fuzzy, fuzzy, fuzzy)

... playing Qbert for 5 hours on 1 quarter at the shore. I had gotten sunburned the first day and decided it was in my best interest to stay out of the sun. My girlfriend spent the day on the beach and checked in on me occasionally. When it was time to go, I had set a new record for that location at well over 5 million points. I felt bad because I had to murder over 50 extra Qberts just so I could put in my initials. May they rest in peace.

(fuzzy, but I'm starting to like it)

... being challenged by my older, more experienced, highly competitive, "video game expert" friend to a game of Vanguard. "His" game. I beat him by 10 points. He immediately demanded a rematch. I didn't give it to him. It was more fun to watch him suffer through the rest of the evening. Mark, if you're out there...

Anytime. Anyplace. Any game.

(more misty than fuzzy this time)

... being so ANGRY at a redemption company for disallowing my entry into the Atari 2600 G.I. Joe: Cobra Strike Contest. They said I left out my proof-of-purchase from the manual. I didn't. Out of the kindness of their hearts, they did send me the Cobra Command hat as a prize. But my name would not be listed among the champions in "Electronic Games" magazine.

(mist engulfs me once again....
voices of long past relatives call to me...
I see a bright light in the distance...
I'm drawn to it...)

Whoa. Enough flashbacks for now. I might never come back.

How's about you ? What are your memories of classic games and classic times ? Let me know. If I get some good ones, I'll post them in a future article.

If you do start to flashback, just be sure to know when to stop.

(Fred Wagaman has been playing games for over 20 years and actively collecting them for almost 10. The 2000 + games that he has takes up most of his home office and living room. He lives in Denver, PA with his understanding wife Jennie and his 2 year-old, button-loving son, Max. He can be mailed at fcw3@postoffice.ptd.net. He knows in his heart that the G.I Joe contest was rigged, but he's not bitter...)

What's Happening in the Hobby?

I decided to start a new column to cover what is the hot items of discussion in the classic game hobby. If you are a regular in the newsgroups, this stuff may be old news for you. But for the rest of you, this can be your connection to what is going on in the classic game market.

Topic #1-The \$30,000 dollar collection

This was probably the biggest topics of the past month. It brought out debates on the impact it could have on the industry, whether or not someone would actually bid on it and more. For days people argued about whether or not it was worth the price. With this industry still in its infancy as far as collecting, it is hard to put an exact price on a

collection of this magnitude. While the person selling it, was factoring in the time spent assembling this collection, should that cost be passed on to the buyer? Sure, it would be nearly impossible to put together a collection like this and it would probably take years to get even close. But what kind of price tag can you put on a large collection of classic games, including complete Intellivision, Vectrex and Coleco collections, over 400 Atari games and a bunch of prototypes and accessories. While this is an impressive amount of stuff, the price is the main topic of discussion. Was \$30,000 too steep for video games? Or was the sheer bulk of stuff enough to justify the price. There is over 1200 different games (AKA: just one Combat, ET, Pacman for 2600, etc...). Well, I reprinted the ad here, without any personal information so that the person will not be harassed. You can then be the judge to whether or not it is worthwhile. Granted, without a complete list of games (I personally think if the person really wanted to sell the collection for that price, he should have set up a web site to list all the games and their completeness), it is hard to make a sound decision. If the games are all (or the vast majority) boxed and complete and in excellent shape, the price is more justified than if the majority are loose. Granted some games were without boxes (AKA: Cubicolor), but almost all of them had boxes. I also trimmed it down ad as it was quite long and alot of it wasn't very relevant to this article (AKA: personal comments on different systems). So take a look and see if you think the collection is overpriced or a bargain. I personally think it is only worthwhile if you are wealthy and don't have the time or desire to assemble the stuff your self. Otherwise, it is probably overpriced at this present time, but may be considered a bargain in about 5 years.

"Here's a brief run-down of each collection (and some comments about each system).

Atari 2600-"Less-incomplete than any other Atari 2600 collection I know of." 435 different games (including prototypes of unreleased games).

This 2600 collection also includes many accessories and premiums. The prize of these is an Answer Software Personal Game Programmer. This gadget downloads a game cart into RAM, where it can be modified. (It's something like the Game Genie for the Nintendo NES.) It was never manufactured, and the whereabouts of only three are known. I have one of them. (The other two are held by Answer Software and another collector.)

Atari 5200-"Complete." plus a number of prototypes.

Atari 7800-"Nearly complete."

Colecovision-"Complete." Includes unreleased Lord of the Dungeon, a drawing pad and a game written for the Canadian Atomic Energy Commission.

Intellivision & Intellivision Computer-"Complete." With keyboard and two store-demo carts.

Nintendo Entertainment System (8-bit)/Sega Master System (8-bit)

Neither collection is complete, but either could be the substantial nucleus of a serious collection. There are several rare titles (such as Sqoon), and the Sega collection includes the 3-D glasses and all the 3-D games.

Vectrex-"Complete." With Light pen, 3-D glasses and extra controller.

More than "Just Carts"

For example, plastic figurines of the Donkey Kong, Mario Bros., and Q*Bert figures. There is a nearly complete set of Activision badges for the Atari 2600 and other

systems.

There's also plenty of magazines. I have a complete collection of Joystik (the National Geographic of video game mags), plus issues of Computer Games, Electronic Fun with Computers and Games, Game Player's, Video and Computer Gaming Illustrated, Video Games, Video Games Player, and Videogaming Illustrated. I also have the first 25 issues of Nintendo Power magazine."

Topic #2-Digital Press Brings Back Prices

The other big topic of discussion is that Digital Press is going to add prices to the newest version of their video game guide. Guess that makes it a price guide, and we all know my feelings on that. I know they had prices in the third edition, but they did omit them from the next edition and I feel that the guide gave enough information. But for some reason (my guess is to increase sales), they decided to bring the prices back. Will this ruin the market? Probably not, but it won't help things. If you want to do a trade with someone, they will now go "Well, it says this game is worth \$20.00 in Digital Press, so I want this game because it is worth \$20.00". So instead of people looking for games that they would rather play, they will instead be looking for games that are worth more money. While this is inevitable and Digital Press is trying to set themselves as the standard for price guides, I still wanted to see things stay status quo a little while longer.

Tune back next month when we will see what the hot topics in the classic game market are.

A Deeper Look at....

This month I will break tradition, and take a deeper look at two Nintendo games. While both games are from the classic era, neither made an appearance on classic systems. These are two games that I really enjoy and so I am going to review them (the joys of being the editor).



Elevator Action

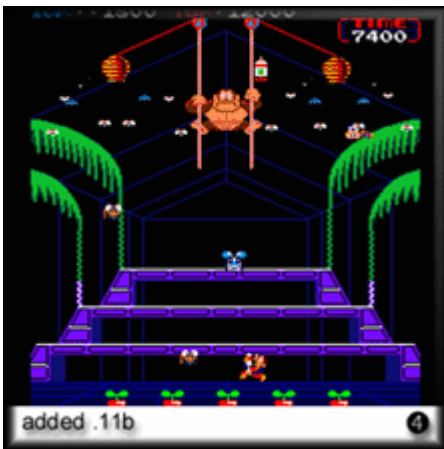
This was always a favorite of mine at the arcade and I was thrilled when I found out it was a Nintendo game. I still play the Nintendo version alot, mainly due to the fact that the MAME version doesn't work. You can get down to about level 15 and it resets. But the Nintendo version plays great. All the elements of the classic arcade game are here, including the many ways to off your opponent.

While today's games almost always feature different weapons or moves as ways to defeat your opponent, it wasn't the case in the classic era. There was usually only one way to do it (Pacman, Space Invaders, etc...), or possibly two in some classic games (Dig Dug and Mr. Do). But not with Elevator Action! You were a clever spy and had numerous ways to off those enemy agents. Let us count the ways. First there was the trusty gun. Just shoot the bad guy and watch him do the death roll. Secondly, you have the shoot out the light and have it hit him in the head. Not only

do you rid yourself of unwanted company, but you also get the benefit of darkness. The third way was to jump on him. Nothing like landing squarely on a person's head to send him to an early grave. Lastly, you could smash him under an elevator. So there you have four different ways to do in the villains (or were you the villain, I never did figure that out).

If different deaths wasn't enough to make things interesting, you also had to move around on elevators (hence the name) and escalators (or they could just be stairs and you sorta glide down). Plus, you had to go to the red doors and get the secret plans. Here is where things get a bit confusing. Why would this top spy organization have color coded doors to aid you? Were they that arrogant to think that noone could infiltrate them? Or maybe there is a double agent who went and marked the doors for you. We will never know, but it helps as you would be going through alot of doors to find the plans without this aid. Speaking of getting help, maybe this is the same person who also leaves a sports car for you at the bottom of the building to use for your getaway.

While there is some repetition to the game as you just keep going in very similar buildings, it is still fun enough to keep you coming back. I also devised another version of the game. Instead of trying to finish the level, I see how many agents I can kill before I bite the bullet. This is good stress relief, especially around tax season.



[Donkey Kong 3](#)

The third in the series of highly successful Donkey Kong games saw the exit of Mario and the introduction of Stanley. As we all know, Stanley's career was short lived. To my knowledge, this was his only game before being sent to the video game wasteland to hang out with all the other forgotten heroes. But did Stanley deserve this? Was Donkey Kong 3, really that bad a game? I personally think his name hindered his career. I mean, Stanley the Bugman, come on. Who wants to hang around with someone named the bugman? That is what cruel kids called someone who had lice in grade school, not the name for game character. Poor, poor Stanley, he never had a chance.

While I cannot speak for the rest of the gaming public, I thought it was an enjoyable game. Sure it didn't have the appeal of the first two, but I still found it an enjoyable game. The first thing you will notice about it is that they went away from the platform gameplay that was the staple of the first two and instead was more of a shooter in the Galaxian mode. Sure only Donkey Kong (in a reluctant role) returned. But despite these changes, it was still a good game.

The basic premise of the game is to either shoot all the bees that are swarming out of the hives that Donkey Kong just shook or to shoot Donkey Kong in the tush until he puts his head in a beehive. Either will finish the level. What is your weapon? A can of bug spray, actually it is one of those odd contraptions that shoots the spray out. You know the one you see in old movies and on the Three Stooges. It looks almost like a caulking gun, but it is full of bug spray and you use it to kill the bugs.

Well, this bug sprayer has very long range and has the power to push a very large gorilla up. My guess is the spray is really cold and it is quite uncomfortable on Donkey Kong's bottom and this makes him inch up.

As with all games, there is more than just that. Not only do bees swarm down and try to sting you (one sting and you are history), but there are bugs that explode and some like caterpillars who won't die. The spray only stuns then and gets them in your way. So, you can see that the game is busy. The levels are also set up differently to keep you on your toes.

Why is a game like this so overlooked? My only guess is that it had to follow two classics and since it strayed away from a winning formula, gamers couldn't warm up to it. It could also be the lack of Mario who left for bigger and better projects. Whatever the case it is a Nintendo game worth owning and hopefully they will fix the MAME version (editors note: I finally have a working version of Donkey Kong 3 for MAME, even though the sound is off a bit and the action seems faster than I remember. I will still keep the Nintendo version as I enjoy both).

Question of the Month

This month I have a much easier question to answer. Unlike the other questions that were more hypothetical, this is a pretty straight forward question. So here is the "Question of the Month!" When you play an arcade game on either MAME or a cartridge version and you start off really bad, do you just play out the game or do you sometimes just start over, unlike if you were at an arcade and paying? I must confess that I have been known to just tank a game if I start off real bad. I didn't really notice that I do it until after I returned from Videotopia last year. After having to pay for every game, I noticed that I would play it out, regardless of the outcome, where at home I would sometimes just start over when I thought the chances of doing well were pretty doubtful. I just wondered if it was me or is this a common occurrence?

Gaming trends on eBay

As I scan over the lists of games for sale on eBay, I have noticed some trends. The first one is that there seems to be a glut of Intellivision systems for sale. I haven't done an accurate count, but I would guess that there is between 2 to 3 times as many Intellivision systems for sale as there was six months ago. This has also led to an overall drop in price for systems and games. While some of the rarer games, when auctioned by themselves, still are getting the same amount. But the package deals are getting roughly half as much as last year.

The other trend I have noticed is the number of Vectrexes for auction at any given time has gone up considerably. Where there would be maybe one Vectrex on the board at a time, possibly two on a busy week, there are now almost always at least four. I have seen as many as seven Vectrex machines for auction on eBay at one time. For a system that is so coveted and continuing to go up in price (the price of a Vectrex machine with one joystick has approximately tripled in the last three years), there seems to be a lot of them available.

My guesses for both these occurrences is that the word is spreading about classic games. With the immense amount of people going to eBay on a daily basis, more and more are seeing that the game system in the attic, closet or garage that they were going to throw out or donate, may have some value. So they are now putting it up on eBay and seeing what they can get for it. On the other side, while the number of collectors for classic games is growing, it is not growing as fast as the amount of stuff entering the market. Thus, the Intellivisions are going down in price. Now the Vectrexes are still going up, but if the supply continues to rise, the prices of these too will drop. There is only a finite amount of people willing to pay the price for a Vectrex and soon they will have one. In closing, if you are into the Intellivision, now is one of

the best times to build up your collection. If you are looking for a Vectrex, you may want to wait a few months and see. Look how much the value of Tengen Tetris for Nintendo has fallen.

Ask the Programmer

Time for another question for Andrew Davie, the long time programmer. Once again, if you have any specific questions, please email them to me or directly to Andrew. Please let him know if you enjoyed his contribution to the newsletter. I feel fortunate that we can have someone from the inside, give us a look into the workings of the game industry. Now onto the question!

Question-"Did you hide any Easter Eggs in any of the games you programmed (beside cheats, etc... that all programmers put in to make testing easier)?

Answer-"Personally, no I didn't do this sort of thing much. I tended not to have space. Of course, there were debug modes which allowed me to step through and view memory. These were usually activated by some combination of joystick presses - don't ask me to remember any. Usually I removed this stuff for a final assembly, but you never know what could be there.

I do recall in several games installing some "invincible" modes where I could play the game and not get killed. But mostly we were asked to put in this sort of thing so that the company publishing it could "accidentally release" the information for magazines to publish in their cheat sections - the thinking being that this would stir interest in the game and make more sales. It was all a bit of a con, really - as these things were put there SPECIFICALLY for that purpose.

I know of many cheats and Easter Eggs that did make it into final product, though. Usually by disgruntled programmers / artists. For example, one artist from long ago (hi Frank!) liked to hide naked women in the backgrounds he did. If you pasted together the screens of a long scroller, for example, you would see that there was a pretty clear reclining nude. Another programmer, rather fed up with work, and with a hell of a lot of ROM space to spare, created a whole slide show... which went something like "this is [name]..." and a picture of him... "[name] is not happy"... and another picture. This went on to parody most of the employees of the company, and really was quite scandalous. I never did get to see "my" screen, and I still wonder about it to this day. I think, to the day he left, he was nervous that our boss would hear about it. Not entirely sure, but I think the game may have been NES Days of Thunder."

(Bio: Andrew Davie. Programmer for numerous games on many different platforms including Atari 400/800, C64, NES and SNES. Been making games in the industry from 1984 - present. Currently working on real-time 3D interactive movies. Contact email: adavie@mad.scientist.com)

Classic Games, New Approach

While searching through the newsgroups, I came upon a person talking about how they created a new game called Grandpa Pacman. Well, being the gamer I am and especially one that likes classic games, I decided to check it out. Upon my surprise, there was not only Grandpa Pacman, but a sequel to one of those great arcade games that you never expect to see a sequel to; Venture. Aptly named, Venture 2, it peaked my curiosity. So I downloaded both Venture 2 and Grandpa Pacman and here are my reviews. Remember that both are free and available at <http://www.lafe.com>: By the way, he is also planning on doing two other games named, Donkey Lion and Mr. Do's Zoo, both of which I cannot wait to try. You can be sure that I will have news on these as soon as they come out. After the reviews, I have an interview with Lafe, the

creator of both games.

Venture 2

First off, you will notice that this is a very polished game. Lafe really put some effort into it and it shows. For starters, you get a story about Winky and his love. Everything seems happy, but looks are always deceiving in classic games. Soon she is stolen away and he must perform tasks to free her. While the story is quite enjoyable, like all beginnings, it will get old fast and thankfully you can easily pass over it. A nice little touch that isn't always utilized.

The next thing you will realize that while Venture 2 plays alot like the original and the main character looks the same, there are many advancements in this game. For starters the graphics are much nicer than the original. The creatures are multicolored and are far more advanced than the original. Same for the sound, with speech for poor Winky. But how about the rooms? Well, each level is themed and there are many varied rooms. Same with the foes as there are tons of different ones. There are also surprises that pop up and unfortunately usually end up killing you.

A few of the rooms that I really thought were great were the Minotaur room, which scared me the first time as the beast came charging at me. Honestly, I was on the edge of my seat. A great room! Another great room is the Poltergeist room with the haunted furniture flying around. It showed a great deal of creativity. Lafe really put some thought into this game and it just isn't another clone.

But like anything, there are good and bad points. Now onto some of the bad points. First, the game goes from pretty easy on the first level to extremely hard on the second level. There are a few rooms, especially the Hell room that are downright nasty. I lost alot of guys trying to get past level two. It got to a point of frustration and I almost gave up, but perseverance prevailed and I made it to level three, my second gripe. I had no clue what to do on any of the levels. Where there is usually some treasure to steal or something fairly obvious, this level is very vague. I had to go to his web site for an idea on what I am supposed to be doing. I must add a compliment here as he does give alot of information on the web site about the different rooms and it is quite helpful. A programmer that really cares.

On a positive note, he does allow for unlimited continues, but only at the start of the next level. If you finish three of the four rooms and run out of men, you will start over with all the rooms undone. This can be frustrating, but he says he plans on fixing this in an updated version.

Overall, it is a very enjoyable game and the price is right! While it can be frustrating at times, it does provide a challenge and can be beaten. Just don't expect to finish it one night as you won't even come close. A good job and I look forward to the updated version.

Grandpa Pacman

Sure there are tons of Pacman rip-offs and another one shouldn't be much news, right? Well, this isn't just another Pacman rip-off or is it? Sure it plays like Pacman and follows all the same rules, but leave it to Lafe to add his own touches to the game.

First off, there are special bonuses that can alter the game including a gun to shoot the ghosts, super energizer and more. Next you have neat little bonus items that move around like in Ms Pacman, with all of them themed to the game. Since Grandpa Pacman is old you pick up things like dentures (didn't know Pacmen had teeth?) and canes. But the best part of the game and the main reason I keep playing it is to see all the intermissions. He has 12 different ones and the handful I have seen

are great! They are filled with humor and will keep you playing the game just to see them.

The controls are a bit buggy. Grandpa doesn't handle the best and he says it is due to age. Guess an old pacman would be slower. While this is novel for a bit, it quickly wears thin and you wish there were some more precise controls. Small gripe for a very enjoyable game that is free.

While it is just another Pacman clone, it does have enough extras added to make it stand out and keep you playing it. So go download it and give it a try. Grandpa is waiting for you and you cannot keep the elderly waiting too long.

[Interview with the creator of Venture 2 and Grandpa Pacman](#)

Question 1. What inspired you to do a sequel to Venture? Was it a favorite of yours or did you see untapped potential?

Venture was one of my favorite arcade games. I used to play it at a Bowling Alley with my friends. We were really into Dungeons and Dragons in 1981, so this was probably the first "D&D-type" arcade games to play. We loved it, but none of us could get further than Level 3. But new games came in, and we never saw it again.

I was disappointed that Venture only had three dungeons. Prior to completing Dungeon 3 (and learning the truth), I had wondered what later dungeons would be like. I began coming up with ideas for future dungeons.

In the height of the 80's videogame craze, Milton Bradley and Parker Brothers made many boardgames based on arcade games like Donkey Kong, Pac-Man, Zaxxon, Berzerk... Since nobody had made a Venture boardgame, I decided to go ahead and make one myself. What started out as a boardgame, with cardboard and paper, soon became a Dungeons and Dragons adventure on graph paper, which I could take my friends through. It included all the dungeons of the arcade game, plus additional dungeons, which I had invented myself.

A decade later, with all of that shelved and gathering dust, I acquired a PC, and the ability to make my own video games. I could have gone through the process of learning to program a game in C++, but didn't have the time. I purchased a piece of software called "Game Maker", played around with it for a bit, but soon learned that it had too many limitations.

Then came Klik & Play, a game-designing kit for Windows. It had the power that Game Maker lacked. I set about to design my own video game. But what game would I make? I had several in mind. I did a few experimental games, just to learn Klik & Play's programming language. My early efforts weren't bad, but I wanted to do something that I would enjoy playing. Why not do a videogame sequel? I thought of Grandpa Pac-Man and Donkey-Lion, but decided to first do Venture. After all, Venture was one of my favorite arcade games!

I brainstormed and put it all down on paper. At first, Venture 2 would only be a tribute to the Atari Swordquest games and have Earth, Fire, Water and Air worlds. But four worlds wasn't enough -- it was only one more dungeon than the first Venture. I added on Desert, Ice, Enchanted, Video and Mystery worlds - a total of nine! I built the game around those nine worlds. Each one would have its own colour-scheme, monsters and treasures. This is the way I wanted the original Venture to be, so I made sure to include all of the best elements from every version of Venture.

Klik & Play also had limitations which had to be worked around. For one, there was no such thing as Global Variables, so I had to store a lot of values in Player 2, 3 and

4 scores and lives-- the only variables which carried over from level to level. Collision detection in Klik & Play isn't very good either, so I had to refine it by creating a smaller circle behind Winky, which would be the actual collision-checking.

Much later in the design process, I decided to add the wizard's castle. It was to have a much more complex series of rooms, but Klik & Play, I discovered, stops working properly if a certain game size is reached. Half a dozen levels (mostly in Exidy's Castle) went on the chopping block.

Venture 2 programming started late August 1995, and was not completed until September 5th, 1997 -- so after two years of hard work, the game is finished!

Question #2. I really enjoy how you create stories to go with your games. What made you decide to include this and is this something that you plan on including in future games?

Early Atari games had stories, but they weren't part of the game. Instead, to learn the story, you had to look at the pictures and read the background information in the manual. Some Atari 2600 games had cool comic books included, with complex storylines - look at Yar's Revenge. For the most part, arcade-type games simply set up the conflict. It was up to the player to make the resolution happen.

But as the technology increased, designers could put the stories right into the games. I'd say post-crash games (NES and onwards) have stories and endings. Some of the NES ones are really lame though. Some recent computer games have more story than game, with extensive non-interactive cut scenes. Having the player sit back and watch for a long time isn't good either.

With Venture 2, I set up the story with Pinky being kidnapped by Exidy, and Winky being sent on a quest to rescue her. Rather than financial gain, collecting the treasures in Venture 2 would be to pay the ransom to get Pinky back from the Wizard. The treasures were spread over nine dungeons. Once all the treasures are collected, the game reaches a climax at the Wizard's castle. I won't say exactly what happens, I'd sooner have people play it. All I'll say is that Exidy is not to be trusted. Don't worry, it's not a letdown like at the end of Ghosts 'n' Goblins.

I admit a princess being kidnapped by an evil wizard is a cliché' storyline, but I think the ransom part is a new twist on things. I wanted also to update Winky's background, and offer a bit of his history. I considered changing the Winky graphic to a little man, like on the arcade game artwork, but I thought it would be best if I kept the same round little guy that people identified with in the first game.

I've thought of what a Venture 3 would be like; probably a first-person 3-D game like Heretic and Quake, with monsters coming at you. You'd see the hallways and rooms through Winky's own eyes. I doubt it will ever happen, unless someone else makes it. Another idea for a Venture 3 game would be a role-playing style like Final Fantasy or Zelda games. Certainly more background information could be given about the village that Winky and Pinky live in.

Question #3-Since you are such a self proclaimed Yosemite Sam fan, did you hide him or any other people in your games? Any little secret rooms or levels?

Good thing you asked! Yosemite Sam is one of the pirates in the Pirate Room on Waterworld. I couldn't resist putting him into the game. Once you've grabbed the Pirate Chest of Gold, he'll appear in the doorway and try to stop you from escaping

from the room.

Question #4-What made you choose freeware as opposed to shareware? Was it a copyright issue or are you the generous sort?

I would have loved to get rich from this game. It was basically a copyright issue. I didn't know how to contact Exidy for their permission to use the Venture and Winky names. I credited them by putting their logo on the Venture 2 title screen, and by naming the evil greedy wizard "Exidy". A lot of the music and graphics used in the game wasn't original either.

I didn't want to get myself into hot water, so I made the game Freeware. By doing so, I could put into the game whatever I wanted.

Question #5-You have talked about your next game possibly being either Donkey Lion or Mr. Do's Zoo. Can you give any previews of what these games will be like?

Donkey Lion will be a cross between Donkey Kong, Donkey Kong Junior, Jungle Hunt, Pitfall, Congo Bongo, Fantasy and Kangaroo. The level order will be randomly chosen, unlike the boring predictability of Donkey Kong. It will have the selection of levels like Jumpman, except the graphics won't be on as small of a scale. After a set number of levels have been surpassed, you'll have a "boss" level to try and get the little girl from the Lion. The graphics will have a tropical, lush jungle setting. Enemies will be rolling coconuts (in place of barrels), living pineapples (in place of fireballs) and snakes (in place of foxfires). The weapon you use against them will be a hunting knife (instead of a hammer). Between each screen, you'll see a record of your progress, with the phrase "How High Can You Try?" (Stolen from Crazy Kong, Stolen from Donkey Kong). I'm really excited about Donkey Lion.

Mr. Do!'s Zoo will be the fifth Mr. Do! game in the highly successful series, unless someone beats me to it. Other Mr. Do! games I had thought about creating were: Mr. Do!'s Candy Store, Mr. Do!'s Haunted House, and Mr. Do!'s Circus - but I've settled on Mr. Do!'s Zoo, because it sounds rhymy and catchy.

It would be a cross of Mr. Do!, Zookeeper, Blueprint, Ladybug, and Fantasy. The plot would revolve around Mr. Do! having to get all of the animals back in their cages. I'd like there to be elements of keys, gates, fences, cages, and a refreshment stand. The Alpha Monster would make an appearance, giving Mr. Do! chances to spell EXTRA. He would use his ball s a weapon again. It would likely be a maze game, but not a chase game like Pac-Man. But I need to brainstorm more ideas. I haven't come up with the actual gameplay yet. The name sounds cool, so I ought to make a game out of it.

Well, hope you enjoyed the interview. Here is the address if you want to check these great games out yourself (website no longer available). It is well worth the time and there is even a very good walkthrough for the Venture 2 game.

The Readers Ask

I get questions about the newsletter all the time and when I see the same question numerous times, I decide to answer it in the pages of this newsletter. I always enjoy any feedback and I am quite willing to answer your questions. So here are the latest questions that have been asked alot.

How Long Does it Take to Write an Issue?

There isn't an exact answer I can give to this as it is a project that is worked on the entire month. I usually start with the personal story and just add on during the month.

As ideas come to me, I go back and add more material. I will sometimes do revisions to articles or lengthen or shorten them as I see fit. I am gifted in a way that I can write very quickly (I can type up to 60 words a minute, if I get in a rhythm. My friend used to laugh when I took typing 1 and 2 in high school, until they realized I was the only boy in the class and was pampered). If I had to guess, I probably spend about 10 hours a month writing, editing and adding graphics to the newsletter.

How Do you Keep Coming up With Ideas?

Since many of my articles are a bit on the bizarre side (my constant attempt to mix humor in to keep it interesting), I am constantly asked how I keep finding articles to write about. The one thing I have always been is a creative person. I just seem to be able to come up with something on the fly. For every article that ends up in here, there are usually two more that are waiting for the next issue. I also derive some of the material from the newsgroups and around the internet. When I see something that I find interesting, I will start working on it. Sorry, there is no secret formula (no mixture of fast food and too much caffeine or anything like that).

What Are the Guidelines for Submissions?

Now that a few brave souls have taken the plunge and submitted, I have receive more requests to write for the newsletter. So here is the very basic guidelines:

- 1. Keep it Clean**-Since we are read by kids and adults, I strive to keep it clean. Steer clear of profanity and any sexual or derogatory comments.
- 2. Keep it Brief**-I usually ask that submissions be limited to a few paragraphs. While there is no exact size limit, I find that articles that go too long, tend to lose readers.
- 3. Keep it Relevant**-Quite simply, have it pertain to video games. Leave those recipes at home (unless it is for power pellets, yum) and no political rantings. If it is about video games and especially classic or neo-classic ones, then I will generally accept it.

That is about it, so feel free to send in those articles and it helps if you have a paragraph about yourself after the article, especially with your email address, so the readers can give you their feedback.

What is in those pellets?

I don't know about you, but I always wondered what is in the dots and pellets that Pacman so desires and the ghosts are willing to die to protect? There must be something either very tasty or very addictive to cause such a stir. Being one that cannot sleep without knowing, we sent in our special agents to steal some of the contraband and bring it back for analysis.

It may seem easier to steal the stuff than people think. I mean a few well trained mercenaries with sophisticated weapons should be able to easily go in and take what they want. Right? We were wrong, dead wrong.

The first group, consisting of three very experienced and very expensive mercenaries were pixilated and sent in. With today's advanced technology, we were able to create an energizer of sorts that would beam the team into the playing field and be able to beam them back out on a moment's notice. We brought in Chekov and Sulu to help (Neither one is very busy these days and can be hired for a very low price, as long as it isn't weekends. Their weekends are booked for Star Trek conventions) in the running of the show and the teleporter. So without a glitch, we sent our men in to get samples and beam out before Pacman knows what hit him. We figured with the vast amount of dots that he has consumed, he wouldn't miss a few. We were wrong!

As the men materialized into the game, their progress was closely monitored from the home base. The entrance went without a problem and the pixilation process went flawless. As soon as they entered, they went to work. "Combat" and "Air Sea" (secret code names) headed for a power pellet. Combat was to extract it, while Air Sea was lookout. At the same time, "Front Line" headed over to get some dot samples. As he was getting the first of the samples, something happened. The ghosts not only came out of their house, but also the tunnels. It was an ambush! Someone had tipped them off. We quickly sent warnings to the soldiers and prepared to beam them back. But our message was never sent. Seems a blocking device was in place and Ms Pacman herself was halting the signal.

The ghosts quickly descended on the party and it was over in seconds. Our men try to fight the oncoming foe, but the element of surprise and the unstoppable foes were too great an odds for our valiant heroes to try and overcome. Our biggest flaw in the planning was we forget they were ghosts and so convential weapons could not harm them. Before we were able to get them beamed out, they were gone. The ghosts devoured all evidence and left no trace of them ever being there. We were a sadder, but wiser group. Actually it was for the best as the mercenaries would have been upset when they found out that we spent all our money on the equipment and didn't have any left to pay them. We all said a prayer for the fallen comrades and knew that there would be no reset button for our men.

We may have lost the battle, but we weren't going to lose the war. Tune in next month when we head back to the playing field to kick some ghost butt! Who you going to call?

Conclusion

I didn't really think we could top issue #10, but I feel this issue did it! Once again I made it bigger and in my opinion, better. I took a few chances and tried a few new things like the news items and the continuing story. Let me know what you think of these and whether you want to see more or have them removed. I would like to thank all my contributors as they are helping to make this the newsletter it is. Tune in next month, when we will try to do the impossible for a second straight month. Remember next issue is the one year anniversary and we will have to think of something special to do! Suggestions are always appreciated!

Tom Zjaba

(All pictures provided by the Digital Press CD. Possibly one of the best deals out there. To get your own copy, go to <http://www.xnet.com/~skelly/> or <http://digitpress.com> and order one).