

TOMORROW'S HEROES
**RETROGAMING
TIMES**

The Newsletter for the Retro Gamer in All of Us

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Introduction

This issue will be a little more somber than past issues. I will try to add in some humor to break it up some, but when I am talking about the change in the industry, it is hard to put it in a positive light. You may notice the new table of contents. This will make it easier to read the articles you want. Thanks to Chris Cracknell for suggesting this (I am pretty sure he suggested it, memory going. If not feel free to correct me)!

Let's Get Ready to Rumble!

Everyone had a different game system when I was growing up and this provided alot of variety. I had the Odyssey II and later the Colecovision. My cousin Jim had the Atari 2600. My friend Davey had the Intellivision and Ed just played everyone else's systems (he later bought a Commodore 64). One thing we used to do is have marathons where we would play one system for a whole day. This particular day it was the Intellivision that was the system of choice. We played some usual games of baseball, Dungeons & Dragons, etc... But the game that really captivated us this day was Boxing! We each chose a boxer and had a tournament. I had the power guy, Dave the speed guy, Jim the mystery boxer and Ed took the stamina fighter.

After a few matches, it became quite evident that the stamina boxer was the best one and Ed went undefeated. It ended up with each of us taking turns trying to beat Ed and his infernal stamina fighter. I came close with the power fighter, but that darn fighter would always heal too quickly.

The battle raged on as we would battle out to see who was next to get a shot at the title. After many, many hours later, Jim with the mystery fighter finally was able to

best him. Of course Ed ended up winning about 40 matches and a very sore thumb. It was a sweet victory for everyone to finally see the champ go down. Later on when we would have more such tournaments, we would leave the stamina fighter out to even things up. It made for a much more unpredictable contest.

MAME Reviews

This month I will take a look at two games that were unknown to me. One I only knew as an Atari 2600 game I would be extremely lucky to find, let alone afford. So without too much of an intro, here are my reviews!



Bullfighter

Growing up, I always wondered why they never made a game about bullfighting. Not that I am a fan of the sport or anything, actually I think it is quite cruel and inhumane. But since they covered every other sporting event, including skeet shooting and arm wrestling, I figured bullfighting would also be turned into a game. Little did I know that it was and I just never had the experience of playing it. Until now!

Bullfighter is a simple game. You are a matador and your weapons are a sword and a red cape. Your opponent as the name suggests, is a bull. Object is to kill the bull and avoid being gored by the bull. Simple enough to understand. But there is one small flaw with this game, the bull will not die. I have stabbed this beast over 20 times before he killed me and didn't best him. He is like the Jason (of Friday the 13th fame) of video game characters, he just won't stay dead.

Don't get me wrong, I don't dislike the game. Quite the opposite, I find it very challenging. Unfortunately I have spent alot of time trying to defeat this bull and all I have to show for it is a body so full of holes that when I drink, I resemble a sprinkler. But I am having fun! Much like Ahab has his whale and Clinton has his Starr, so do I have the bull and I will die trying to bring him down!

The game features some cute little features that add to the charm of the game. First there is the red glare in the bulls eyes. He really looks mad. There is also the funny way the bull runs into the wall and stuns itself. But be careful as it only last a second and then the bull is back with a vengeance. I made the mistake of trying to use this moment as a time to finish the bull off only to be found on the wrong end of a bull's horns (as if there is a right end).

Some other nice features are the way you can lose your sword or just get grazed by the bull. Sometimes you are so knocked out that another matador has to come and distract the bull while you regain your composure. I also like how your sword can break and someone in the audience will throw a new sword to you. These little touches make the game.

All in all, it is a fun little game. I guess that they made the bull so tough as to keep the game from getting boring too fast. I guess that once you kill the bull, it will all be downhill. But what a challenge it is to kill that darn creature!



River Patrol

The first time I ever heard of this game is when I saw it on the top of Jerry G's most wanted video game list. I remember wanting to find it because he was willing to give the person a free Texas Chainsaw Massacre as a finder's fee (it isn't on his list anymore, so he must have finally found it). The River Patrol game looked sorta boring, but I did want to play Texas Chainsaw Massacre. Until it became available on MAME, I only figured it was an Atari 2600 game that probably sucked because it was so expensive and that is generally the rule.

Well, I soon came across the game again. This time it was on a new version of MAME. The name had rung a bell and the screen shot jarred a memory. I would now finally play this game. How is it you ask? Well, it is pretty decent. Nothing spectacular as the graphics are alright and the gameplay is fun, but not absorbing like many games.

The basic concept is to ride down the river and save people by running over them. I personally think this would injure or kill them, instead of saving them, but video games never followed conventional rules (much like cartoons). Of course there are obstacles in the way like rocks, whirlpools, alligators and other boats. As one would expect, you must avoid these.

Each level is a stretch of river and as you progress, there are more rocks to avoid and more gators and boats. I made it through three levels and from what I can tell, there isn't too much different from one level to the next. This kept me from playing too much as there was no "can't wait to see what is next" angle to keep me coming back.

While this game may be valuable for the Atari 2600, it is only mediocre for the arcade. It will provide you will some fun and keep you busy for a few hours, but the thrill is short lived. This game may be from the classic era, but is certainly is no classic.

Debate-Limited Edition Carts-Great Marketing or Cheap Sales Technique?

Like them or hate them, but limited edition carts are here to stay. Cubicolor started it all and now it has become the guaranteed way for a programmer to get sales of his cart. Two carts have recently been released in limited, numbered editions and both were instant sellouts. With this success rate, others are bound to follow. So Retrogaming Times is giving you this debate on whether they are helping or hurting the industry. As I have stated in past issues of Retrogaming Times, I am against them and so I will take the side that is against them. To debate me is Chris Cracknell, AKA: Crackers. He is a programmer and wants to defend the practice of limited edition carts.

In traditional debate fashion, I will begin with my points, followed by Chris'. Then I will give my rebuttal and he will finish with his. While the debate may get fairly serious,

keep in mind this is done in the spirit of good fun. I felt it would be best if we had both sides of this issue covered and Chris was gracious enough to participate. So here is the first Retrotimes debate!

Tom's Debate against Limited Release Carts

I am personally against limited edition games. I know that they are becoming all the rage and with the near instant sellouts of them, we are bound to see alot more of them. This is what I fear. I have no problem with a programmer wanting to make some money back from their time and effort that they put into the game and I feel that any well made game will sell without having to be limited. Quality has always sold and I feel that this is true in any area, whether it be tires for your car or classic video games.

But now that the limited edition has been made popular, programmers are going to see this as a quick and easy way to recoup some of their investment and possibly make a profit. If you sell 100 copies of a limited game for \$25.00 each, that is a quick \$2500.00. I know that is hard to ignore. I just feel that they are selling themselves short. Unless it is a really, really good game, why would anyone want to spend \$25.00 to buy a regular edition copy once the limited edition are sold out? You may say to add to their collection, but most collectors want the best one, whether it be a mint version of a game or the limited edition version. I just feel that it sends a message that you should buy this game not because of how good it is, not because of all the effort that went into it, not to encourage the programmer to continue and make games, but because it is limited and will be worth money down the road. This is what disturbs me. How many people who buy a limited edition game are buying it for the gameplay?

What this does is open up the floodgates for all kind of people to make and distribute limited edition carts. Since there is no regulation or restrictions on this, anyone can and will make these. Soon you will see some really bad games come out. Once word gets out that if you make a game limited, it will sell, then where is the incentive to make a good game? Why should you put all that work into making a great game, when you can throw together any game and sell it? Also, if you think that \$25.00 is alot, you will see higher and higher prices. If they sell out at \$25.00, then the reasoning will be that maybe people will be willing to spend \$50.00 or even a \$100.00. How long before there are different levels of limited? Maybe a ultra-limited Platinum edition of 50 carts at \$100.00 each and a Gold edition of 100 carts at \$50.00 each and a silver edition of 200 at \$25.00 each? Think this is ridiculous? It isn't half as ridiculous as the people who will want to own all three editions for the sake of completeness. Think I am being ridiculous? Check back here in a few years and see if I am right. As this market gets bigger and bigger, there will be more and more people willing to buy these carts. The argument that you cannot sell more than 100 copies of a game and so that is justification to limit it, will soon become moot. The biggest problem with this industry has always been the amount of importance placed on the rarity of a cart and not the quality of the game.

I am not saying this about any of the people who are bringing out games now, I am sure they are quality games that have alot of effort put into them and it probably shows. I have not tried these games and I don't want people getting the impression that I am bashing them. I admire them for adding to the video game market and applaud their effort. It is just their marketing that I have a problem with. But it is a free country and everyone has the right to do it the way they feel is in their best interest. But they should also know that they are helping to change this market and whether they intend to or not, their actions are being watched and since they have proven successful, will be mimicked.

As I stated earlier, quality will sell and if the game is good, then you don't need to limit it, it will sell itself. Limiting a game not only sells the game and the programmer

short, but it puts the emphasis on the value of the cart and not the game itself. Would you rather sell games to customers who are buying it solely for the gameplay and the quality of the game or would you rather limit it and not know how many are actually being played? You must ask yourself what is more important, the value of the gameplay or the monetary value of the cart?

Chris'Debate for Limited Edition Carts

My opponent makes some valid points. Limiting the total number of copies of a game is wrong. Creating an instant UR cartridge to make a buck is just plain wrong and indefensible but that doesn't mean that there is no place for a "Limited Edition" label variation. The best solution to the potential problems of a "Limited Edition" is a method of distribution I've dubbed the "Colbert Release" in honor of Bob Colbert who, I believe, is the first programmer to release a homebrew cartridge in this fashion.

The "Colbert Release" involves three stages. First a binary (.BIN) file of the program is released on the internet. People are free to download this file and evaluate the program via emulation or a Supercharger before they buy it. They're even free to burn their own EPROM's if they have the means. Next there is a "Limited Edition" release of the program on an actual cartridge. This release is usually limited to 100 cartridges, each with a serial numbered, color (and sometimes autographed) label, sometimes there will be minor alterations to the program code itself to include a serial number in the program. Then when the "Limited Edition" carts have run out the program is released in an unlimited run, this time with a more generic label.

The "Colbert Release" method benefits both the programmer and the collector. First, collectors can examine the program before they buy it to determine if, on merits of the program itself, it is worth the purchase price. If they still wish to buy an inferior program on speculation that they will receive a "Limited Edition" and that it will appreciate in value as a collectable then they knowingly run the risks associated with that practice. But if after evaluating the program they feel it is worth \$16(*) then they get a program they're happy with. If they get their order in time to snag one of the "Limited Edition" carts then they get an added bonus, if not they still get a program they felt was worth the \$16 they paid for it.

The "Colbert Release" benefits the programmer because although the quantity of orders may not change the speed in which they come in will. Maybe you write a program that only 180 people are interested in buying. Releasing the program in a generic, unlimited form means there will be a lot of people going, "Ah, I'm in no big rush to get it. The program will always be there, I'll wait until my birthday cash comes in and give myself a treat." The programmer gets a trickle of cash spread out over a long period of time from 180 buyers. But by employing the "Colbert Release" it adds an incentive to the consumer to make their order early. You may still only have a total of 180 buyers, but 100 of them will send in their orders very quickly in hopes of snagging a coveted "Limited Edition" cart. Sure, it is a marketing ploy but it serves both the programmer and the collector. Besides, a certain amount of marketing savvy is required to make any product successful. Hasbro wouldn't be picking the meat off of Atari's bones right now if the Tramiels had even an ounce of marketing sense.

You can't be into creating Atari 2600 carts for the money. There are easier ways to make more money when you add up the time involved in writing the code and even worse (in my opinion) manufacturing the carts, taking the orders and shipping the products (not to mention the costs of parts). But still, a "Colbert Release" will net the programmer \$500(*) in a very short period of time. This is nice, who wouldn't like to get a cheque for \$500 in the mail? It gives the programmer an added incentive to do what he already loves to do, write code for the 2600. Plus by not limiting the number of games released in total he ensures that revenue will continue to trickle in from

cartridge sales. And I will admit it, there is a little ego boost that provides icing on the cake that something with your signature on it may possibly someday be a collectable.

For the collectors, a "Colbert Release" gives them the protection of knowing what they will be buying. Plus, if they give early support to the programmer's efforts then they are rewarded with a "Limited Edition" cartridge. Even if it is just a homebrew cart, it's still nice to have a color label, with a serial number and the artist's autograph.

The value of homebrew carts as a collectable has yet to be determined. Much like Zeller's and Cooper Blacks carts there will be collectors who covet them and collectors who shun them. Likewise for the "Limited Edition" labeled homebrews. But I still feel that "Limited Edition" label variations can be made available to collectors without hurting the hobby if the "Colbert Release" method is employed. There will no doubt be many shady deals done in the future. As long as there have been collectors there have been people eager to screw them out of their money. The anonymity of the internet also increases the opportunity for negative reciprocity. But collectors can protect themselves by always buying from a well known, respected source and by not buying a cart unless they've seen the .BIN for it first. By refusing to lay out cash for carts that aren't "Colbert Released" the consumer can protect themselves from bad deals and keep the fun of "Limited Edition" label variations in the hobby.

() Figures are based on the average price of a Hozer Video Games homebrew cartridge with royalties. The \$16 breaks down as \$6 for parts and shipping, \$5 to Randy Criehtfield for manufacturing the cart, taking the orders and shipping the cart (you can tell he's doing it for the love of the hobby because you couldn't pay me enough to do all that work) and \$5 to the programmer.*

Tom's Rebuttal

I do think that programmers should make money from their games and the faster the better. Nothing like monetary compensation to encourage future projects. But like the proverbial saying "there is more than one way to skin a cat", there is also more than one way to encourage people to buy your game. Having a limited release with the carts each numbered is only one way. If programmers put as much thought in the advertising and promotion of their carts as they did their actual programming, then we would see a variety of unique and exciting ways to get us to buy their games.

I will now offer one possible scenario to get gamers to buy your cart early and help make some money off the cart. Instead of making it limited, why not instead have a promotion where the first 50 people (or set your own amount) to send in money before the game comes out will get to see their name on the game in the credits. You could have a list of the people who helped make the game possible page that appeared at the end of the game. If this would take up too much space on the cart, then you could do the same thing in the manual. Everyone likes to see their name in print and this would be a way to be immortalized (we all know how long Atari carts last).

This is just one way to encourage support for your game. It just takes a little thought and a bit of creativity to do something unique, instead of following the crowd. There are ways out there to promote your game without harming the industry and limiting your audience. We just need to get creative and isn't that what classic games are all about?

Chris' Rebuttal

Programming the 2600 often requires very tight code, especially since any

homebrew games are only 4K in size. Often the programmer has to optimize his or her code to to run on only 128 bytes (that's all the RAM a 2600 has) and has no memory free for perks. But where the program will allow it, making custom programs for the first 100 or so buyers is a nice idea. But whether it's a custom coded program or a fancy label, it's still a limited edition release.

If the fear is that by creating a special, limited edition label, a mediocre cartridge may become a highly sought after collectable and that this in turn will cause more programmers to create mediocre programs to cash in on the demand for collectibles, then making a limited edition custom coded program will do nothing to change this situation. Whether a limited edition special lable or a limited edition custom code collectors and programmers can both be served by employing the "Colbert Release". If consumers refuse to buy before they see the .BIN then they will always be protected from laying out money for a mediocre game. If, however, they want to buy blindly in hopes that their limited edition homebrew will become a valuable collectable, then it is really a case of "buyer beware".

The Future of Classic Gaming

As I promised last month, I will tell you some of the changes, both positive and negative, to expect as the classic video game market explodes. These are only my speculations based on what I witnessed in other collectible markets. If I learned anything, it is that there are certain trends that are consistent, whether you are talking about toys, coins, comics or classic video games. I do feel there is a good possibility that most, if not all of these will happen. I just hope that by listing these, I am not giving ammunition to someone looking to cash in on this market. So without any further adieu, here are the good and bad to come!

The Good

1. More unreleased games will surface as people really start to look for these.
2. Game companies like Activision and Hasbro may secure the rights and start to release compilations that feature unreleased games or have people complete unfinished projects.
3. More copies of some of the really rare games will surface as closets, attics and garages are cleaned out. As the price of games rises, so will the amount of product.
4. More and larger shows will be held and people will be able to get together more frequently to play, swap and buy games.
5. More new games will be made for most of the systems.
6. We will see more different merchandise from shirts to mugs to mousepads.

The Bad

1. Counterfeit games will surface.
2. Games will be reshrinkwrapped either to increase value or to switch carts for the purpose of fraud.
3. People will start doctoring games to increase their value. From replacing worn or missing labels to copies of instruction manuals, people will do things to make games closer to mint.
4. Prices of systems and many of the rarer games will shoot up dramatically. Many collectors will find it hard to complete collections as prices soar.
5. More and more companies like Telegames and Adam's House will re-release games.
6. Prices at flea markets, garage sales and thrift stores will rise and selection will decrease.
7. More rip-off artist will enter the market and try to scam you.
8. Places like O'Sheas will be cleaned out and the stock will be sold elsewhere (possibly even on Home Shopping Club, shudder).

Swimming with the Sharks

Lately, there has been some discussion about keeping classic game collecting out of the mainstream of hobbies. Some have pontificated that this was a good thing. That way, our little group can have our things all to ourselves... and at reasonable prices.

I've come to the conclusion that it's too late.

Oh sure, I haven't yet heard of a classic game collection being profiled on "The Collectors Show" on FX. Or of billboards advertising a Video Game Collector's Show and Sale at a local auditorium (sponsored by the same outfit that arranges those baseball card/toy/stamp/coin/comic shows). So what has brought me to this conclusion you ask ?

Ebay

I'm not going to add my voice to those that have gone before me decrying that Ebay has ruined the hobby and everything was better for the classic gamer before the demon-spawned web-site was formed.

No, I'm only using Ebay as a barometer to measure the change in the wind. (I know that barometers aren't used to measure changes in wind direction, but work with me here). That wind has brought the smell of money to the vultures of the world. The people that are always looking for the next big thing to profit from. The profiteers that created the Beanie Baby phenomenon. I call them Sharks.

Sharks will swim around not really doing much until they catch the smell of blood in the water. Then they go nuts. Devouring that which they've identified as prey without concern for themselves or the others of their kind. If one of there own becomes wounded, they will make them part of the buffet as well.

Not every seller on Ebay is a Shark. There are plenty of people that run a side-business on the internet. Many sell games. Many are game collectors/players themselves that are taking some extra stuff and selling it so they can buy more stuff. No, I'm talking about the people who have no interest in the items that they are buying and are only buying them in order to resell them at huge profits.

Ebay has given these Sharks a worldwide market. The opportunity for targeted marketing to thousands, nay, tens of thousands of potential vict.. customers from around the world. All they have to do is provide the items to these markets. There is relatively little cost, overhead and risk compared to normal outlets.

Ebay is not at fault here. No more so than a gift shops are at fault for Beanie Babies. And there is nothing inherently wrong with being a Shark. This country is based on a free market economy. Buy Low, Sell High. Greed is Good. I love the smell of money in the morning. God Bless America !

In any market, when a demand is identified, there will be those who are more than willing to supply. When the supply is limited relative to demand, prices will increase. Ebay has given the Sharks access to more demand than they previously knew. It has also given potential customers access to a market they might not have know existed, thus increasing demand. As demand increases, people will scramble to supply that demand, thus decreasing supply overall. As this spiral continues, we are ultimately headed towards a feeding-frenzy.

I believe Ebay is just the first of the game markets we'll see this happen in. Next we'll begin to see classic games in the cases at the local antique stores. Flea market vendors will begin to keep their Nintendo carts behind the tables, not under them.

The average person will begin to think that their old Atari in the attic will send Junior to college, and will price it as such at their next yard sale. Common carts will begin to creep up in price. (\$10 Pac-Mans anyone ? \$25 Super Mario Carts ?) Anyone who sees these things will think they are "Collector Items" and begin to snatch them up driving prices up even further.

Oh whatever will we do ?!?

Our hobby is ruined....

Wait.

That's what we'll do.

We'll wait.

What we're starting to see is the beginning of the storm surge associated with a hurricane know as "The Fickle Public". TFP will sink a fortune into this stuff. Then move on to the next big thing. Maybe lunchboxes, or Hardy Boy books, or Strawberry Shortcake dolls. I don't know what it will be. The Sharks will catch wind of it first, but there will be something "else".

So, when the opportunity comes, profit from your extras. Make some ungodly amounts of money from your rares. In 10 years, you'll buy them back at pennies on the dollar.

But, most of all, play your games. Enjoy them. Share them with friends and relatives (which aren't necessarily them same thing). And be patient.

The tide will recede.

Our time will come again.

(Fred has been playing games for over 20 years and actively collecting them for almost 10. The 2100 + 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 also has some rare "Combat" carts that he'll let go for only \$10 each. Get them now, before it's too late. They make great Christmas gifts.)



The Many Faces of.....Zaxxon!

Zaxxon was a game that was not only huge in the arcades, but huge on the home consoles making an appearance on four different systems. Although Zaxxon was a trademark of Sega, (yes, Sega was around before the NES era) Coleco produced it for the Atari 2600,

Colecovision, and Intellivision. Later on, just minutes before the famous crash in fact,

Sega released its own version of its smash coin-op for the Atari 5200. The game itself has a space-age theme. You're a spaceship penetrating into enemy territory dodging or shooting enemy planes, missiles, and other typical outer-space nasties. But what this game has that others of its genre didn't at the time is a unique three-dimensional point of view. Back in the day, whenever I heard or encountered the word "Zaxxon", I always thought, "That weird 3-D game." It was definitely a cool concept for its time.

Disqualified: Atari 2600

You can't expect the Atari 2600 version to be faithful to the coin-op. Instead, this version has a head-on point of view. If you had never played Zaxxon before in the arcades or on another system, you probably wouldn't think this game is **that** bad. On the other hand, if you had played it before somewhere else, you **would** think it's that bad. It does offer some challenge though. If you get over the fact that there are only three nasties, you could probably play this game for a little while. The boss is tough!

Bronze Medal: Intellivision

This version is hardly a step up from the Atari 2600 version. The view is the same straight-on crap found in the 2600 version. This is a bit more fun and fast-paced though. More nasties and obstacles. However, this is yet another game that has been diagnosed with Intellivisioncontrollerbuttonsyndrome, so be sure to ask your thumbs for permission before play :)

Silver Medal: Colecovision

My first Zaxxon experience was with this version. My neighbor had a Colecovision and I'll never forget how fascinated I was with this game. The graphics and sound were just too real, and the awkward 3D perspective was too cool! Unfortunately, I was only like 6 years old and sucked so bad I was lucky if I made it past the first wall. This version is a HUGE step up from the prior two. Most of the stuff from the coin-op is there and play is great and customizable with the difficulty options. There really is nothing wrong with this version.

Gold Medal: Atari 5200

Sega did a fabulous job on this game for the 5200. Though the Colecovision port is very good, this version is simply flawless. The graphics and sound seem so advanced that it could pass for an 8-bit NES game. Play is unbelievably smooth, and the analog controllers compliment the game well. Unfortunately, this game was released just before the video game crash of 1984 and therefore this game is extremely hard to find as are several other great Atari 5200 games. However, if you're more interested in playing than collecting this is one ER that no one should have reservations shelling out extra cash for.

(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. Doug is also looking to complete the Atari 5200 set and needs these games. Bounty Bob, K-Razy Shootout, Quest for Quintana Roo, Star Wars:ROTJ-DSB, and Zenji. If you have any for sale or trade give him an e-mail.)

Zookeeper Battle Update

I am still amazed at the amount of emails I received on my Zookeeper battle with my

wife. I must have received almost 50 emails of encouragement, most for my wife. At least 2/3 of the emails wished my wife luck in beating me. You bunch of turncoats! :) Well, here is the report.

After a hard battle we both completely demolished the old scores on Zookeeper. I started off the challenge by putting up a score of 192,000, which is almost 60,000 higher than my previous score. This only lit a fire under Andrea (my wife) and she soon bested it. Not only did she beat it, but she knocked me from first place down to fourth. She ended up posting a high score of 250,000. I did finally manage a score just over 200,000 and made it back into the top three.

Things then quieted as she started getting into Tetris Attack on the Super Nes and I was determined to beat the bull on Bullfighter. But then something happened. She was playing the game and I came up to cheer her on (honest!). After her game ended, I took a turn and put up a score of 302,000! I had two 60,000 point jumps on the same level and it sent me over. I had reclaimed the throne! But the story doesn't end there. A few days later, one of my sons wanted me to play MAME for him (Joshua, he is only two but loves video games). So I played a game of Zookeeper and did something neither of us ever did. I finally passed the Lion level and moved into unfamiliar territory. When the game was finally finished, I had posted a score of 370,000 and secured my dominance for at least another month!

But this is one battle that is far from over. Andrea has posted a score of 270,000 and is nearing the 300,000 mark. At least I gave myself some breathing room. Now to take advantage of this time and try and build up the Robotron scores! (Update: The high scores race has gotten much closer as Andrea has now put up a score of 350,000. She even had a 120,000 point jump, the highest so far. So the race became tighter).

What's Happening in the Newsgroup?

Unlike last month, there has been quite a bit of activity this month. Mostly due to a certain person not putting up 5000 posts. So here is an overview of what were the hot topics.

Classic Games get no Respect

This thread started with someone attending a collectible show and seeing very little video games. He asked why the market gets little attention and no respect. This led mostly to people being happy for being overlooked as it keeps the prices low and the supply available. There were others who argued that if more people took the market serious that more products would surface and less stuff would be thrown out.

Video Game Babes

There was a thread about who are the cutest/sexiest females in the different eras of video games. Many votes for Ms Pacman and many other of the different girls who have captured our attention. My personal vote went for Smurfette. Any girl who can captivate a whole village must be something (of course having no competition doesn't hurt).

The Message

Possibly the funniest post of the month has been a phone message that was left on Alex Bilstein's answering machine. It involved some guy who was calling to sell him some imaginary Colecovision games. One was called Pancake boy and another was Snaperoo.

Price Guide Discussion

Another person spoke of bringing out a price guide. This brought up a storm of

responses, most against it. With two price guides coming out, why would we need another? This person admits to only selling classic games for about a year. Where does that make them an authority to release a price guide? At least the two coming out, Digital Press and JerryG's both are done by people who have been in the industry for years and have extensive knowledge of classic games. They will be more than just prices, but also information and more.

The sad part is he asked the newsgroup what their opinions were of this action and almost everyone said not to do it. But he plans on doing it anyway, so one must ask why he bothered to solicit our opinions (this was mentioned by someone on the newsgroups, but I cannot remember who).

eBay Happenings

A few trends continued on eBay. The Atari 7800 machines keep creeping up in price. I have seen system prices move up a little more with a loose system getting around \$30.00. Look for the price to go up with Christmas nearing. Classic games will become more and more a novelty gift with each passing year. This will continue to drive prices up.

While the prices of Intellivision games has steadied, the system prices also has been moving up. They are still cheap, with a loose one getting \$20.00-\$25.00 and a boxed one fetching \$35.00-\$40.00, but it is better than the under \$20.00. Coleco systems that are boxed are on fire! I have seen a boxed system top \$100.00 on more than one occasion. Of course it has to be complete to garner this price and one of the most cherished parts is the Styrofoam that has the Coleco logo on it.

A trend that is gaining more and more, is the listing of each game individually. eBay is getting congested with list and list of Pacman, ET, Combat and other common games listed. Most don't sell, but some do. What gets me is that someone will buy a Pacman cart for \$1.00. An average price for the cart, but then there is sometimes as high as \$4.00 shipping charge added to it. Is a Pacman cart (usually loose) worth \$4.00-\$5.00? I don't think so, but people either are oblivious to the shipping costs or don't care.

Mystery Carts Solved!

Remember the mystery carts I spoke of last month? If not go back and read it, we will wait.....dum.....dee.....dum. Back? Good, well the mystery is over, sorta. It turns out that JerryG knows a bit about them. Here is what he had to say "The games are for the Video Entertainment center. I don't know much about this except that it is an Australian PAL system and that the controllers have a 14 button keyboard which uses game overlays and that the Mfg. Number is MPT-03".

Interesting! I am still amazed that I stumbled across some Australian games at a garage sale. The woman didn't even have an accent. Maybe she picked them up on a trip over there or something. Well, at least I now have an idea what they are.

A Deeper Look.....

Time again to delve deep into the soul of a video game. Time to conjure up images of the game for all to ponder. Time to get out of this Halloween mode (maybe because the games are Halloween based). Here are two more games for me to dissect. Enjoy!



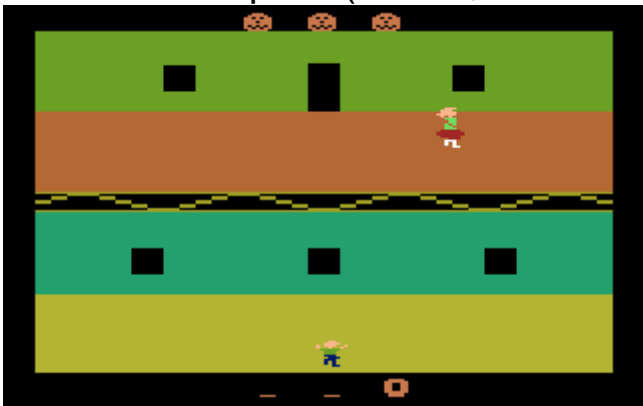
[A Deeper Look at.....Dracula!](#)

This is one of those little gems only found on the Intellivision. It is a fine example of the originality that can be found on the Intellivision, especially from Imagic.

Going against common practice, this game pits you as the bad guy. You get to play the chief bloodsucker himself, Dracula. It is your job to survive and we all know how Drac does that, by drinking blood! So you must roam around the town and look for unsuspecting victims and bite their necks. This will replenish you and keep the strength up. Of course this will get you in trouble with the local police who will come after you. But you can either avoid him or turn into a bat and fly away. This unfortunately brings in a new nemesis, the vulture who loves to feast on bat wings.

Each level is completed by you biting a certain number of victims and returning to your casket before the sun comes up. As is the rule in video games, the higher the level, the more people you have to bite. The sun also comes up quicker and the police get tougher. This adds up to quite a challenge.

While it is an ER game, it is one worth owning for your Intellivision collection. It is well worth the price (about \$25.00 boxed).



[A Deeper Look at.....Halloween](#)

This was one of the first controversial games released. Along with the the other game, Texas Chainsaw Massacre, these games caused quite a stir. Many stores pulled them off the shelves due to the violence and gore. Yes, gore on an Atari 2600! And these new gamers thought that gore began with Mortal Combat. Ha! This is the granddaddy of bloody games.

The object of this game is to save the kids from Michael Myers. You play the role of Jamie Lee Curtis (I cannot remember her screen name). He follows after you with a big old knife and if he catches up to you, he cuts your head off. Blood spurts out and you run around like a chicken with it's head cut off (literally). Since it is Atari, it is more humorous than stomach churning.

The best part is the change in music. First off, the Atari does a good job of trying to replicate the music from the film. When you consider the limitations, it is a good job. But what I really like is how the music changes to more fast paced when Michael enters the screen. It really adds to the game and is by far the best part. The gameplay itself is average.

The game is worthwhile from a novelty standpoint. It is one of the first games to show blood and from a historic standpoint it deserves merit. But it is also quite expensive and a copy can range from \$50-\$100.

[Question of the Month](#)

Well, last month's question wasn't much of a question. Out of the 77 responses, all said they would keep their collection after they completed it. There was an almost even split, 35 said they would just enjoy it and 33 said they would start collecting variant labels. The rest didn't mention, they just said they would keep it.

I will try to get a more varied answer this month. If a rich relative offered to give you any five arcade machines of your choice, what would they be? Please try to list the games you really want to own and not ones you think are worth the most (AKA: don't say you want the military version of Battlezone due to its scarcity). Also, put them in order of preference if possible. Here are the five I would want most to own.

1. Crazy Climber
2. Discs of Tron
3. Robotron 2084
4. Zookeeper
5. Tapper (the original)

Need Your Feedback

I have a few things I would like to get the readers input on. So please take the time to respond to these so I can get a better idea of whether they are worth pursuing or not.

1. [Another Newsletter](#)-I was considering doing another video game newsletter. The tentative title would be "2nd Wave" and it would deal with the neo-classic video game systems and the computer games of the same era. For those not familiar, it would deal with Nintendo, Sega Master System, Turbographix, Sega Genesis, Lynx and more games systems all the way up to the Super NES and Jaguar. Pretty much any system that is dead or near death. It would have a little about classic computers from the Atari 8bit and Vic 20 all the way to the ST and Amiga.

It wouldn't be as long as Retrotimes, but it would still have enough info to keep you happy. My question is would you like to see this? Is there anyone who would like to contribute articles to it? I would need a few regular writers to pull it off, as I am already doing two newsletters and even my fertile mind has limits.

2. [Collected Edition of Newsletter](#)-While I really don't want to sell subscriptions to Retrotimes, I have been asked by a few people about doing a compilation of issues. Some people said they would want a version they could read offline and let friends and family read. While this is only an idea, I thought that maybe a full year compiled into book form may be possible (soft bound to keep price down), my question is how many people would be interested in purchasing it and what price do you think would be feasible. Even a disk version would be possible.

If I would do this, I would redo all the issues on a desktop publisher and make it more attractive. I would also add more graphics and possibly add some new stuff. As I said, it is just an idea a few people asked about and it got me thinking. Any feedback is appreciated.

3. [Another Story](#)-At first I didn't think anyone was bothering with the Pacman story I did the past three issues, but then when it finished, I received alot of feedback. Most of it was positive and it made me decide to see if people wanted more. So please let me know if you want me to attempt another story and if so, what would you like to see me do? Your feedback is always appreciated. If there is enough positive responses, then I will start another one next month.

Finale

Once again we come to the end of an issue. This issue was a little more serious than usual, but still had enough fun. Hope you enjoyed it! Check back next month when I will take a look at the women in classic games. We will tip our hat to the ladies that made many of the classic games more memorable.

[Tom Zjaba](#)

(Some 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).