Retrogaming Times

Issue #41 - January 20th, 2001

Table of Contents

01.	Temptation Video Game Island
02.	MAME Reviews
03.	Letters to the Editor
04.	Space for Rent by Fred Wagaman
05.	The Many Faces of.....Mousetrap! by Alan Hewston
06.	Another Disc in the Wall - Playstation Breakout by Geoff Voigt
07.	Sites of the Month
08.	Headed to Philly!
09.	Odds and Ends
10.	eBay Notes
11.	The TI 99/4A Games - The Post TI Era by Jim Krych
12.	Conclusion

Temptation Video Game Island

As the ship left the port, I knew I was in trouble. As a classic video game fanatic, I decided to partake in a very strange situation. I was going to be sent to a tropical island for two weeks to be seduced, enticed and tempted by some of the hottest sirens. No, we are not talking about blondes, brunettes and redheads, but instead we are talking about the Sega Dreamcast, Playstation 2 and the Nintendo 64. That's right, I am your typical classic game fanatic and I swore off modern games, but now I must spend the next two weeks being seduced by them, forced to play their games and try my hardest not to give in to the temptation. You may ask why a person would subject themselves to this? A few months ago, I figured I could easily fight off such temptations, but now I must prove it. No more false bravado, I must face the fire.

As the ship reaches the island, I make a quick look around for any sign of classic game life. A thrift store, maybe a garage sale sign, anything. I felt like a junkie who was already going into withdrawal and looking for a quick fix. As I scanned the island, all I saw was a few small buildings, a restaurant and a nightclub. I knew I was really going to have it rough.

I was soon escorted to my lodging and I was amazed! There inside my spacious room was a big screen TV with stereo speakers. Talk about unfair advantage. At home, I played my Atari on an old television I picked up at a garage sale, which had a pretty good picture, but it was only a 19 inch television, nothing compared to this behemoth. Then as I looked around, I saw a huge wall full of video games. There were at least a thousand games on the wall, from the Sega Saturn to the Playstation 2. Almost every game you could imagine. I ran over and started to look through the list, which was surprisingly placed in alphabetical order and by system. My host said goodbye and locked the door on the way out. I smiled a small grin as I looked over the wall of games. Sure, they were all games for modern systems, but there was also some great compilation CDs made for these systems, CDs of classic games. This may not be too hard after all. I laughed to myself, until I looked closely and saw that all the Midway Collections, Atari Collections and Namco Museums

were missing. Of course the Activision Classic and the Intellivision Lives for the Playstation were also missing. Man, they are good. But I know a few little tricks. I quickly reach for the Frogger, which is very close to the original, but I found nothing. Curses, they have removed every game that is based on a classic game. Gone is the Q*Bert, the Pong, the Pacman World. This was going to be alot harder than I thought. But wait, I did spy some salvation! In the corner was a copy of Ridge Racer and I remember hearing how you could play Galaxian while waiting for the game to load, it was something. So I grabbed the game and ran over and opened it, only to find a copy of Blasto. I fell to my knees and cursed them.

As I knelt there, seething with anger, a voice came through the some speakers. "Hello, Mr. X and welcome to Temptation Video Game Island (name changed to avoid a lawsuit). As you can see, what you have is a huge selection of modern games to play and only modern games. You may also notice the door is locked and this is for a reason. The room is monitored and only after you play a predetermined number of hours of video games, will the door unlock and you will be free to roam the island. You will also notice that you have a fully stocked refrigerator and you may call for anything you may desire to eat or drink. But you will not be allowed to order any alcoholic beverages until your game playing is done for the day. Also, if you desire some company, we can arrange to have someone set to your room. Just let us know what you want and we will be more than happy to meet your needs. Now go ahead and play any system you wish, they are already set up and all you need to do is hit the button on the box for which system you want and it will set up for it. Enjoy!" With that the room fell silent. I knew I was stuck. But I was not going to give up that easy. I would put my time in (8 hours a day) and get out on the island. There was bound to be classic games somewhere and I was determined to find them. So I hooked up the Sega Dreamcast and started playing NFL 2K1.

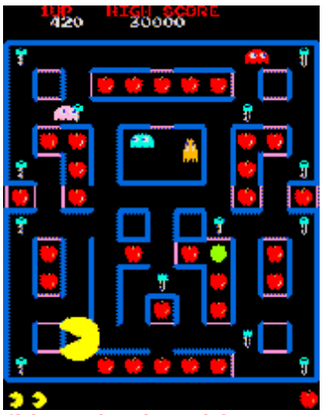
(Tune in next month when we see if Mr. X can survive his first day of video games. Check back to see if the withdrawals start and what levels will he sink to find some classic games.)

MAME Reviews

Time to take a closer look at a few more classic games that can be enjoyed on everyone's favorite emulator, MAME!

Super Pacman

When you have a very, very popular game, what do you do? Make as many sequels as you can! This is one of the those sequels to Pacman, possibly the most popular game of all-time. While the game is maze oriented and 2D like the original, there is much more to it. This time the maze is closed off to you. You cannot just move around anywhere you want, you have to unlock areas by eating keys. Eating keys? Maybe it is me, but I always thought people swallowed keys to keep something locked, not the opposite. Leave it to Paccy to get things backwards. Who knows, maybe he is storing them in his mouth and has a prehensile tongue.



(Now that's a big pacman!)

Back to the review, this game has you moving through the maze, clearing it and having to unlock sections to get access to them. There is the typical energizers which give you the ability to eat the ghosts and something new, the ability to turn into Super Pacman! This is a huge Pacman who can run through the locked sections of the maze and cause all kinds of damage! But like the energizers, this is a temporary power, so don't waste it.

There are some nice touches in this game. First, instead of just eating dots, you move around the maze eating hamburgers and other items, yummy! Plus, the locked sections force you to pay attention. If you don't, you may find yourself at a dead end (like the tunnel, make sure both sides are unlocked) and this can be a big problem. All in all, it is a fun variation on the Pacman theme and one that I do recommend.

Funky Bee

Never heard of this game before, but I am a sucker for any game with the word "funky" in it, so I downloaded and played the game. I did not know what to expect from the game, but I was surprised to find it was essentially a Xevious game, but you are a bee instead of a space ship.

The goal of the game is to fly around the forest and collect honey by running over flowers. As you zip along, lots of bad insects come to try and kill you. You can dodge them or just shoot them with what I guess is a modified stinger. If you make it all the way through the level, you go to the hive and dump off all your honey. That is essentially the game.

(Did someone say honeycombs?)

Funky Bee is another game that has a rarity in video games, deadly plants. Like Space Harrier, if you hit a tree, you die. So you not only have to watch out for the deadly insects

and collect honey, but you need to watch out for trees which will splat you. Sorry, but you cannot shoot down the trees, you are just a bee after all.

The graphics are bright and quite primitive. While you can tell what everything is, they are a bit on the bland side. The music isn't much better. This pretty much sums up the game, pretty bland and forgettable. Guess there is a reason I never heard of the game before.

Letters to the Editor

Another batch of the inquisitive, the informative and the just plain weird. Keep those emails coming and I will keep publishing them.

Hi there! I was wondering if I could get your professional input on something. I just bought a Colecovision game called Mr. Do! I checked your (and other) rarity lists, and saw the title, but not the manufacturer of the one I have. Mine is Mr. Do! by Universal. Any idea about this? Would really appreciate your opinion on this. signed Curious Coleco Fan

The version you have is the same version that everyone has. The Mr. Do cart was done by Coleco, but on all of their arcade conversions, they listed the name of the company that made the arcade game, hence the "Mr. Do by Universal" or "Mouse Trap by Exidy". Hope this helps.

I know you mentioned it before, but how do you clean your classic games? Thanks! signed Carts Getting Dirty Fast

First you get a cup of bacon grease, then you mix in some flour and....oops, that's not right! That is a recipe for gravy and biscuits, my bad. What was the question? Oh yeah, how to clean classic carts. I personally get some q*tips and some alcohol (not the kind you drink, put back that Jack Daniels) and I dip in the q*tip and rub it along the contact and then along the inside of the cart. Then I take the dry side and wipe out any excess alcohol. This should remove just about all of the dirt and dust that accumulates.

What would be some good games that I can play with my imaginary friend? signed Missing Patient

This is a hard question to answer without knowing more about your imaginary friend. If he does not have any substance (unlike Mr. Giggles in the cheese commercial), then you should probably stay away from Combat and Warlords. But you could play games like Chess or Checkers, where your friend could tell you which piece to move. Hangman would be another possibility. I hope you and your "ahem" friend have fun. This may be the most unusual email I have ever received. Let's see if anyone can top this one.

Space for Rent

By Fred Wagaman

I was just thinking about how things have changed for arcades over the years.

Traditionally, the arcade was the place you would go to for cutting edge video games. The latest and the greatest were there. Row after row of machines all clamoring for your quarters. A wide variety of games were available. Everything from maze games to shooting games and even pinball if you were in the mood. A large portion of your “fun” money was spent there.

And if we wanted to play games at home, we could. Most home versions captured the spirit and feel of their arcade cousins, but couldn’t match them for sounds or graphics.

Now look at arcades. Most of the floor space is taken up by redemption machines. You know, those ticket dispensing games where you can spend $10 to earn enough tickets to get a twenty-five cent plastic spider. The machines that are there fall into one of three categories. Fighting, racing or shooting. There may be a leftover older game setting

towards the back with a bad monitor or a broken joystick. But its more likely you'll find a couple pinball machines there instead.

So what happened ? Where did our arcades go ?

I could go on about the obvious. That home machines have caught and to some extent exceeded the capabilities of their arcade cousins. When a game is brought from the arcade to home, it is generally improved and enhanced. If you have the chance, compare Soul Caliber from the Dreamcast to its arcade counterpart and you'll see what I mean.

Truth be told, you could compare video games to another entertainment industry. The Movies.

Twenty to thirty years ago, the movie theatre is where you would go to see the latest and greatest films. Some theatres would have a large variety to choose from, all clamoring for your movie money.

And if we wanted to watch movies at home, we could. When the network would get them, we'd get to see them, chopped and edited. The spirit of the movie would be there, but the TV couldn't compare to the theatre when you compared the sound or picture quality.

But with the advent of HDTV, digital cable, DVDs and satellite dishes the gap has been significantly narrowed between watching a movie at home and watching it in the theatre. You can't go into any electronics store without being bombarded about "home theatre". A wide screen TV, six speaker (plus subwoofer) surround sound, DVD player and bag of Orville Redenbacher and you can rival just about anything at the local cineplex.

But theatres are still around. The movie industry is booming. What's the difference ?

The movie industry had its at home competition arrive later in its lifespan. Movies have been around for 100 years while TV has really only been around en masse for 50 or 60 years. It really only been the last 20 or 25 years that we've seen these 2 growing closer with the advent of cable.

Yet the movie industry keeps going strong.

The reason that I think that arcades are going away (and don't kid yourself into thinking they are not) and movies continue to thrive is twofold.

One, movies have been able to make themselves accessible to a wide age-range of people. Yes, a majority of tickets are bought by 13-27 year olds, but there is usually something for people both younger and older than that. Arcades, on the other hand, are viewed primarily as the domain of 16-21 year old males. Old enough to drive, but not old enough (in most cases) to go to the bars. And the games primarily target that audience almost to the exclusion of others. The redemption games are targeted towards the younger player, but those players usually don't have a lot of disposable cash.

And secondly, movies have continued to promote themselves as an event. You go to the movies. You make a date to go to the movies. You hire a babysitter to go to the movies. Movies are, a term that has just recently been batted around for arcades, "Location Based Entertainment". You stop by the arcade. You end up at the arcade. But how many people plan on going to the arcade ?

Some people have and continue to try to make "Location Based Entertainment" arcades. Dave and Busters, Dreamwerks, GameX and the like have added things like restaurants, bars and the like to make themselves more of an entertainment center than just an arcade. And they continue to succeed in limited numbers.

I think these places are delaying the inevitable. Arcades will survive, in a limited fashion, only as part of something else (Restaurant, theme-park, mini golf course, race track), but as a stand alone entertainment center. Forget it. Game Over.

(Fred has been playing games for over 25 years and actively collecting them for over 10. The 2500 + games that he has takes up most of his home office and living room. He lives in

Denver, PA with his understanding wife Jennie, his 5 year-old, button-loving son, Max and his 17 month old, 4th player, Lynzie. Fred's co-worker just bought a 36 inch HDTV that has 45 jacks and can also double as a computer monitor. He is sooo jealous. Fred can be reached at fcw3@postoffice.ptd.net)

The Many Faces of . . . Mouse Trap

by Alan Hewston

"Mouse Trap, Mouse Trap, Cheese is the bait". . . lyrics from the song Mouse Trap by Buckner and Garcia off their Pac-Man ever Album. This game was popular enough to have a song written about it, but only 3 home versions were released in the Joystick (Classic) era. With Coleco having exclusive rights to this Exidy game, it was limited to the 3 systems that Colecovision programmed for.

You are the mouse collecting cheese, dog bones and other treasures and must avoid the cats and the hawk. Trapped like a rat in a maze, you must collect all the cheese to move to the next level. Each dog bone collected allows you to turn into a dog for long enough to get away and/or to eliminate a few cats in the process. Bonus points are earned, and escalate in value, for each successive treasure collected, and cat you catch while you are a dog. The maze has 3 colored doors that must be opened or closed to get all of the cheese, but you can also use them to avoid or trap the cats. Once the level begins, the cats will come out one at a time, to play (chase you) in the maze. Later levels and starting options allow for the cats to come out faster, chase you faster and/or be smarter. But, you must also keep away from the hawk who will come out and kill your mouse, even if it has turned into a dog. The center of the maze lies an IN passage that takes you to one of the 4 corners. The bones and treasures are always near to the corners.

Extra lives are all too generously given out and keep you going - like forever - so play one of the more challenging settings or prepared to get bored.

Aracade Game Designed by: Larry W. Hutcherson Sr.

Classic Platforms: Atari 2600, Colecovision, & Intellivision.

Categories: Gameplay, Addictiveness, Graphics, Sound & Controls

Here's a game that I've never really played much of, and I must apologize that I didn't do much homework, such as playing the MAME or arcade versions either. I think that all of the gameplay was included on the Colecovision and Intellivision versions.

Bronze Medal: Atari 2600 (29)
Being a complex, 4 button game, the Atari 2600 version just had to suffer - but actually does quite well considering. The Gameplay is severely handicapped by the three colored doors (and maybe some poor programming by Coleco) and scores a marginal (3). Instead of three door colors, the much simplified maze is composed of one set of doors that are toggled with the fire button, when held and released. Using the fire button and quickly releasing activates a dog bone. At least this fire-and-release / fire-and-hold-then-release technique attempt to fill the bill. An improvement may have been to hold the button and simultaneously move in one direction, where the three door colors and dog bone are one of

each of the directions. A small number of joystick era games do something similar to get four directions, plus four more commands out of the limited stick. But, I digress. (Strike One!) Additional features missing are: not enough cats, no hawk, and no warning that a cat is entering the maze. Plus the maze is really small. The A/B difficulty switches do allow options for harder and/or faster cats, without this, the game would really become boring fast. There is an added feature of the 2600 Gameplay that is unique, but probably was not planned. Once you have pushed the dog bone button, you can immediately push it again, and consume another bone. This is not something that most players would want to do, as you lose the bone and get nothing more for it. But, what if you wanted to push the button again, not right away, but right before you would turn back into a mouse again, and potentially get killed. All versions could have allowed such an improvement, so that you can prevent getting killed just before you turned back into a dog again. You use up a bone, but get to be a dog again for x number of seconds again. Neat idea. But I digress again (Strike Two!).

Anyhow, the Sound was not too bad (5), but there is no music and not much else going for it. On a positive note, the Controls are perfect (10) and you get what you want, when you want it. Each tap of the stick moves you exactly one unit along the maze. The Graphics are pretty good (7) and do not detract form the game. There just isn't much used. The Addictiveness is lame scoring a (4). When there really is not that much going on, the game isn't worth playing.

Silver Medal: Colecovision (33)

I'm sure that Coleco intended this version to best the Intellivision, but that's not my finding. Despite everything being included in the programming, the Gameplay only scores a (7) very good. Unless a game has a pause (and this does not), it loses 1 point. But they botched up 3+ Gameplay features that nearly ruin this game for me (-2 points). The worst offender is that the movement of the mouse is done in half spaces. Why in the world would you move in half spaces when everything else is based on full spaces? This makes for a lot of fighting with the controller. I did not penalize the Controls for this SNAFU. Then, when you collect a treasure/bonus, not only do you get a nice chime, but you also get a delay of game penalty. It takes some getting used to, as you are rolling along and then everything pauses for a split second, and then before the audio clip is done, the game resumes. Finally, when going into the IN box, your mouse is thrown so quickly to a corner, that you cannot see which one it went to. You either had to be watching with a hawk-like eye (pun intended), or search the corners to find yourself. I learned to check, when possible, all corners first (for cats), and then zip into the IN box. There is also a poor feature that only up to 4 dog bones are displayed, regardless of how many you actually have. Perhaps this matches the arcade, or to make it harder, or to simplify the graphics, but the INTY version shows up to 8 bones in reserve. Just when you thought you had a nice stash of bones, they're gone before you'd notice.

Added features include a brief intermission for every level, and every new mouse played. The game pauses while the new mouse runs from the top left (extra life reserve area) and moves on down to the maze. A feature that is different on the CV and INTY is the cat warning - when a cat is ready to leave one of the 4 the waiting boxes and jump into the maze. The INTY provides an audio cue, whereas the CV is purely visual. Too bad I discovered this after my marathon game ended. I got used to the easy to notice INTY audio alert, and noticed later that on the CV, the cat stops pacing when it is ready to pounce. Perhaps the arcade version was purely visual, which actually is more challenging, and realistic. There is no pause button, which is odd, and unfortunate for a CV game [although . . . when playing without a hawk, you can lock yourself into a box and hide - ie pause]. As is usual, the CV version (& INTV) offers 2 player games, and 4 levels of difficulty. Unfortunately, they did not have the wisdom to program game 1 to add the hawk at some point - thus playing game 1 becomes a marathon.

The Controls were fair (5), but again a major frustration. None of my five CV sticks give me the control that I really want. This score would be worse if not for the Amiga stick. I also like the Intellivision button controls better than the CV. The indentations of the CV control buttons, rather, the plastic between the keypads hinders me - blocks my shot (button press). When I need to press on that Dog Bone button, I want it now. The door color layout

was good and easy to remember, Red, White (actually Yellow) and Blue across the top of the controller. The overlays are pretty, but not necessary.

The Graphics are crisp (8), the best of the three and include all of the bonuses and effects that you'd want from a game, but nothing really spectacular. The Sound is pretty good (7), but I liked the INTY a wee bit better. Finally, the Addictiveness is decent (6), but suffers from the complexity and difficulty of using the controllers.

Gold Medal: Intellivision (37)
You thought that I'd never give a gold medal to an Intellivision cart. Every score is at least a 7, which means that nothing is lacking (But then, nothing is exceptional either). I really enjoyed playing this game despite my dislike of the INTY controllers. I highly recommend using the stick insert to make the INTY pad an INTY stick. The Gameplay is nice (8) and has nothing to hinder it, but also does not have a pause. The Graphics are pretty good (7), but are a bit ragged. The Controls were actually pretty good (7) . . . and I expected worse. Somehow I was able to quickly get by - most importantly to control the stick, but then also to learn to use the button pads easier than the CV. The Sound is nice (8), essentially the same quality as the CV, but nothing special. The Addictiveness is pretty good (7), making it the one that I'd like to play the most. I played this game longer in one game than any previous sitting playing INTY games.

Come back in the cold icy days of February when I plan to push a few ice blocks around and review Pengo for the Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Commodore 64 and Atari 8 bit.

(Alan Hewston is now looking for the Colecovision version of Pitfall II: The Lost Caverns - if you have one for sale or trade, Pitfall Harry can be reached at Hewston95@stratos.net Stay tuned for a possible Retrogaming Times review of the really Lost Caverns of Pitfall II - the Adventurer's Edition. And if the DP Guide finally arrives next month, I may get my list of 2000 Video Games updated and published.)

Another Disc in the Wall: Playstation Breakout

by Geoff Voigt

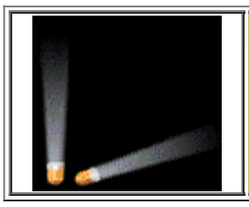
When I was at Classic Gaming Expo 2000, I had the chance to play a preview of this game. I guess I told enough people that I had done this, and the result was that the finished product appeared as a gift for me for Christmas. After looking at my notes of my surface impressions I got in Las Vegas, (I liked what I had played, and was looking forward to the finished product) I gave it another full play.

THE GOOD: I have to give Supersonic (the developers; also did PS Pong) credit for shaking up the whole concept of Breakout. You don't just attack walls. There's Sheep (essentially moving blocks. Good idea), Chickens and other farm fowl, Knights, Mummies and Dragons, and Factory Sentries. While there are blocks, some you have to destroy to make circuits from one end of the wall to the other. Tinkering with a main game mechanic can be either good or bad. (See below) The graphics are cheerful and happy. I liked the "Paddle Characters" that were in Pong, and they appear here again. 'Course, not everyone liked them. But I do. The physics make sense, and there are options available to make sure that while playing, one doesn't get stuck in those loops that happens so often when playing 2600 Super Breakout. You can finally break more than one block before the ball has to come back down. It's cheap. All the game sellers I saw that had this didn't have it priced for more than $25.

THE BAD: (Who's got a few bucks down that this is the first thing I complain about?) No Paddle. Breakout just inherently needs a paddle controller to play right. The Analog sticks are available for play, but they don't feel exactly right. I often found myself switching between the stick and pad; it the middle of the same playfield even. But on the back of the case, it mentions compatibility for a special controller, Model# SLUH-00059. Could this be a paddle? Or is it the Jogcon controller mentioned in the instructions? The Jogcon is a regular PS controller with a small steering wheel in the bottom center of the pad. I'm thinking about getting one, if I can find it for slightly less than the $40 price tag I've found it for online. Not all the new ideas work, and some frustrate me to no end. I cannot express in

words the level of frustration/hatred I have for the “Wolf” levels. This is not “Breakout”, this is “Paddle and the Wolf” (bust out the Moog as its theme music, Mr. Prokofiev...). I eventually ‘got’ some of the ball kick rounds in the Factory, but not before I got demoted to Beginner. Again. Which brings up another thing that yanked me about PS Breakout... I can play 2600 Super Breakout until the cars come home. You want me to juggle 3 balls with double paddles? After having had about 5 beers? Sure. No problem. THEN HOW COME I KEEP FALLING DOWN THE SKILL LADDER? I’ll get initially rated as about ‘Contender’, and then the Wolf level knocks me down! Drives me nuts..... This is one of those games that I really can’t guess whether others will like it or not. All I can do is hope that my look at this game gives other a guide as to making their own decision. I’ll probably pull it our every now and then, but don’t look for it in my “Most Played” pile.

(Geoff Voigt is currently petting a cute Kitty. gvoigt@ridgecrest.ca.us)



Sites of the Month!

Sites of the Month
Time to shine a spotlight on some much deserving sites. These are the sites that deserve to be visited as they offer something to the classic gamer. As always, feel free to send any sites that you think deserve mention and we will gladly list them.

The Handheld Museum
I am a big fan of handhelds, mainly the tabletops and this stop is one that I frequent. Whether it is to read about handhelds I have or to dream of ones that I have yet to add to my collection. With lots of nice photos and plenty to read, this is a great site for all handheld fans! Check it out at the following URL:

http://www.handheldmuseum.com/

Pong - The Official Site
Want to know the story behind the first video game and still one of the most enjoyable games? Then check out this site. It will let you know all you ever need to know about Pong (except that if you say pong backwards, you get gnop, which is half of the name of the old game gnip gnop, which was just ping pong backwards, but I digress). Anyway, this is a very interesting story and every classic gamer should read it and tell it to their children around a campfire. Plus, there is lots of info and pictures on all the pong units and more! Check it out at the following URL:

http://www.pong-story.com/

Headed to Philly!

After some thought, I have decided to head to the Phillyclassic Convention this year! I really wanted to go last year, but was unable to attend. This year I made sure I was going, by committing myself early. I have already paid my admission fee as well as reserve three tables, so I am going! If you have not looked into attending this show, you may want to take a look. It looks like the big show of the spring and the place to be! Here is the URL:

http://www.phillyclassic.com/

Hope to see you there and stop by and say hello!

Odds and Ends

*Atari Sold Again-It was only a few years ago that Hasbro quietly bought Atari for $5 million. There was much rejoicing as we were going to finally see some of the great classics updated. While there was a handful of games brought back, like Pong and Super

Breakout, for the most part, the Atari games were largely left ignored. But now the once great company has changed hands again, this time Infogrames. Let's hope that more games are made from the new owner.

*Nuon is finally released!-Project X has become the Nuon and now is a reality! It also is the home of a new version of Tempest by none other than Jeff Minter. Add in some neat features it adds to DVD and you have a must have for someone who doesn't already own a DVD system (like myself). While only two games are currently available for it, look for more support down the pike.

*Classic Gaming Award-Valter Prette (you may remember him from earlier issues of Retrogaming Times when he was trying to get new Intellivision games made) has made a new award for classic gaming. He put up the first list of nominees and I cannot argue with any of the choices. My guess is that Joe Santulli has the best chance of winning, mainly because he has been nominated twice.

*Portable Atari 2600-Check out Kevin Horton's Puma, the portable Atari 2600! It uses a Sega Nomad body and looks awesome! Check out his project at this URL: http://tripoint.org/kevtris/Projects/puma/puma.html.

eBay Notes

While the prices of systems and carts seem to have leveled off or even gone down some, accessories are going up! Take a look at the going rate of an Atari 7800 power supply ($25.00-$30.00) or a working 5200 controller ($25.00 and up) or even a regular Atari joystick ($6.00 and up). As more and more people find systems either in their basements or at a garage sale, they often find that they need a new power supply or their joysticks are shot and they are raising the prices of the accessories. If there is one area of eBay that is rising, this is it!

But like alot of things on eBay, patience is necessary. Where a set of Atari joysticks may fetch $20.00 one day, they may also go for as little as $5.00 another day. Plus, make sure the seller is offering some kind of warranty or email and ask them what happens if it arrives DOA (dead on arrival). You may get a great deal on that 5200 trackball, but if it doesn't work, then the shipping would be too much for it.

The TI 99/4A“Games - The Post TI Era”

by Jim Krych

The TI is certainly a blessed machine for it’s day. A very well designed Video Display Processor, with several graphics modes, and bit-map, plus variants of that, and above all, many sprites. 32 to be exact. The sound chip is excellent, thought not as good as the SID, still very effective. And the speech synthesizer adds an extra element to applications, games or otherwise.

And, we know that a good many games were made for the TI during the TI era, especially the third-party games, Parker Brothers, Atarisoft, and then Sega and Imagic.

Some really innovative games out AFTER the TI Era.

It is not easy, right off the bat, to design an assembly language game for the TI. You need extra hardware-32K memory, disk drives, RS232 card for the printer, in short either the PEB, or the stand a lone peripherals. Mini Memory allows you to do it, with a limited amount, but you can test your routines line-by-line.

The systems by Cor Comp and others allowed for quite a few non-PEB owners to have disk drives and extra memory. I remember the big deal that having 360K floppies was such a milestone. We take so much for granted now.

And then again, you also needed info on how the machine ticked. The meat and potatoes of gaming, the sprites, sounds, keyboard/joystick control, etc. Unfortunately, that

information was in limited supply, and TI's own Editor Assembler manual didn't help with that, and came with some very famous bugs and errors in it! The best I have in my own possession is the Compute! Book, it really covers everything in assembly language. So my hat is off to those programmers for doing what they did.

I enjoyed TI-Runner. I was also a very big fan of Tunnels of Doom, so when Asgard Software came out with their T.O.D. Editor, boy did we have fun with that!

The Infocom games were neat, and I liked the fact that we TI users could enjoy their titles on our machines as well.

Two games that came from overseas, they always come up with such neat programs and hardware!, were Freddie, and Major Tom, a Major Havoc clone. Of course, I haven't mentioned them all.

And that is the only slight problem with my post TI Era gaming, I was more into trying to program with assembly, than playing the games! I did come up with a demo of a hover tank in the middle of the screen, moving that sprite around with the joystick, and then having the word "FIRE" displayed when I pressed the fire button!

Extended Basic was a nice addition, but it lacked certain features. One thing that you could do, is load a machine language program into the lower 8K of memory. This would allow you to have a whole bunch of new features, in XB. Since your upper 24K was program memory anyway.

The best of these, by far, is The Missing Link. This utility added so much to XB, that you could have very well-designed games with it. And that is what had been done, by a young programmer in Ohio. Coming up with a multi-disk graphic adventure game, "Where are the Mexican UFO's?" Tim Bodemiller is his name.

To be fair, much was done with the 32K limit of the TI's expanded memory. It seems much was done trying to do as many applications, word processors, and dBase clones, into that memory and not too many awe-inspiring games that used multi-disk loads, or bankswitching.

One thing that hurt the cartridge market, was the existence of cart emulators, to allow you to store them on disk, and pass that around. That, and rampant piracy, which affected all systems of that era.

But I do remember being told that Asgard Software did sell a lot of it's cart based games, especially Tris.

The TI was definitely pushed beyond it's limits in many ways, and the games proved that. Either through assembly language, or assembly additions to XB, or even C, you did find that to be true. Although, the more "serious" applications were always being pushed.

There was a glance at what might be, though. When we were designing the AEMS system, the assembler, loader, and linker, Joe Delekto and Jon Dyer came out with TI-Nopoly. While mostly done in c99, modified to work with the AMS, this Monopoly clone is 96K in length! The different graphics being changed incredibly fast, showed just what could be done with a memory mapped expanded memory system. To me, it really looked like an early NES game.

It's actually better now if someone wants to design a retro-gaming clone for the TI. With the emulators out there, and the wealth of knowledge that is available, it certainly is possible. I would have loved to see Wizard of Wor for the TI, or a Star Castle. Finding spare carts to use for new carts, well, that is another story…

Those wishing to know more, contact the TI 99/4A web page. Also, Bill Gaskil has a wealth of knowledge as well.

("Hi, my name is Jim W. Krych. I am a 31 year old technician, with an Electronics Diploma and a soon-to-be finished Computer Programming and Operations Diploma. I am currently employed at the finest maker of electrometers/nanovoltmeters/etc., in their

troubleshooting/calibration department. I have a 17 month old son, his name is Treyton. I enjoy retrogaming and things that go with that. :) My email address: jwkrych@n2net.net)

Conclusion

Add another issue to the finished pile. While not the biggest issue, there is still some good reading for all you classic game fans! Be sure to get a subscription to Classic Gamer Magazine as it is great (and not just because I joined the staff)! Cav has done a wonderful job of making each issue better than the last! Check back next month when we will be adding a new writer to the staff of Retrogaming Times. Dave Mrozek the Video Game Critic will be adding his reviews. You can check out his work at his extensive review website at: http://members.home.net/dmrozek3/index.htm

Thanks for joining us for another issue and keep playing those classic games!

Tom Zjaba

This issue was done after listening to various versions of the Hamsterdance song, which may explain some of the strangeness.