

Retrogaming Times

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Welcome Back!

Retrogaming Times is back! At least for one issue. Consider this a Christmas gift to all the former readers. I also did a special issue of Bit Age Times. Enjoy the holiday issues but don't expect another issue for awhile.



A Worthwhile \$5.00 Investment

I was up at Toys R Us when they were having their 50% off green tag sale. I was looking for some video games on the cheap and found a few. But the one game I bought for my kids, Intellivision Lives for the Gamecube, little did I know it would be the best investment. It cost a mere \$5.00 for the game and it has become their favorite game.

Little did I know that the simple but addictive games would capture my kid's attention. Their favorites right now are Astrosmash and Shark! Shark! And my one son, Justin has topped over 90,000 on Shark! Shark! So it proves that great video games are truly timeless!

While I have the game for the Playstation 2, it wasn't until I bought it for the Gamecube that my kids became interested in it. To be honest, the PS2 gets little attention. I spend my time on the XBOX and my kids play the Gamecube and Dreamcast.

G4 Icons Show

When I bought Tivo for my wife last year for Christmas, little did I know it would also enhance my television watching. Before Tivo, I watched maybe three hours of television a week. It was mostly a football or baseball game here or there. I never knew what channels we had on cable and for that matter never really cared. But with Tivo, I could tape shows and watch them every time. I was never a video tape person.

One of the first things I did was check out G4. I had heard about the video game network, but never really watched it. The few times I checked it out, it was informercials or annoying people who had too much attitude. But as I browsed over the channel, I noticed something called "Icons". Soon I found stories about the history of Atari, Intellivision, the arcades and more. The show was what I was looking for. While I knew most of what they talked about, I did find out some interesting things. I found out that Utopia was partially influenced by the movie "Killer Shrews". I learned the whole story behind Donkey Kong. It was a fun show and made me want more. The only problem is there was little else on the channel that appealed to me. But one nice find is not too bad.

Some shows that I would like to see in the future would be shows on the Vectrex, the Bally and other obscure consoles. I would like to see a show on the evolution of the handheld system. And I am surprised there is no show

about the Colecovision. How about the evolution of third party companies? There are alot of good topics they could cover. But they tend to go off topic like the one on George Romero. A great director but it had nothing to do with video games.

A Public Service Announcement

A word of caution. Do not hook your video game system up to the Clapper. While it is a fine device and the thought of turning on your system with a mere clap of your hands may sound appealing, don't do it. All you need to do is get one high score and start clapping, only to turn off your system and any proof of your high score. So please leave the Clapper hooked up to lights. It is for your own good.



Beyond the Atari Flashback

I saw the Atari Flashback system and wondered how well it is selling. There is nostalgia for classic systems but is there enough market to justify a system like that. \$30.00 is a decent price for it, but one has to wonder. I look over the list of games and wonder if they could not do better choosing. Why put paddle games like Breakout and Warlords if you are not going to include paddles? You think they would want a few sports games. Sure they didn't age well, but many people played them in the day. It is about nostalgia. And speaking of nostalgia, what is up with the Atari 7800 controllers on the system? Noone is nostalgic for the Atari 7800. Make a joystick that looks alot like a classic Atari 2600 controller, but has two buttons on it for the Atari 7800 ports.

I would like to see other systems come out like this. Personally, I would love to see the Vectrex get re-released. I do see two big pitfalls. First, the screen would drive up the cost. Second, many of the best Vectrex games were arcade hits and it would be costly to secure the rights. Speaking of rights, who owns the right to the Cinematronics games? But think of how cool this would be and it could be popular as it would give the kids a system that would not monopolize the TV. But would kids today really want a system with vector graphics? It would have to be color to have a chance. Those color screens would not fly today.

Another system that comes to mind but it quite doubtful is the Colecovision. The big problem with the Colecovision is that it's most popular games were arcade hits. Donkey Kong, Zaxxon and Mousetrap are three games that come to mind. And each game is made by a different company. But the Colecovision is one that is a favorite among collectors and game players. And if by some stroke of luck they could secure the rights to bring on the Smurfs and Cabbage Patch Kids games, they could really pull in the buyers.

The best one would be a mini arcade machine. Think of a Vectrex that would allow you to buy carts that would give you a handful of actual arcade games to play. If you could somehow make the system for under \$100.00 and then sell the carts for \$19.99 each. Or you could even do the games on mini discs to keep the costs down. You would buy a cart and get three or four arcade games on it. A Namco pack would give you Dig Dug, Pacman and Pole Position. An Atari pack would give you Asteroids, Centipede and another game. If you made it look cool, people would pick it up just for a display piece. It is probably not feasible but it sure would be cool. Just my dreaming of more stuff to buy that I do not need.

Dr. Sane - The Space Invader Sessions

Today we sit in on Dr. Sane as he talks to one of the aliens from the game Space Invaders.

Dr. Sane - What brings you to therapy?

Space Invader - It is my whole existence. I feel like I have no control over my life.

Dr. Sane - Why do you say that?

Space Invader - Because I do the same thing everyday. I move back and forth as some ship shoots at us. We all move the same way, we look the same as every other guy in our row. It is so boring.

Dr. Sane - What would you like to do?

Space Invader - Just once I would like to get out of the formation and go bowling or something. You know that I have never watched a television show. The song I have ever heard is that boring marching song that plays as we conquer another world. Could we just once get some rock n roll or country music? Anything would be an improvement.

Dr. Sane - Have you talked to your leader about this?

Space Invader - That is the problem, noone knows who the leader is. Rumors persist about this big scary monster but for all I know there is no leader. Just once I am going to go up instead of down. I will turn in circles and see what happens. Then I will see if the great leader comes or not. Heck, I may even grab a ride on the space ship that flies overhead.

Dr. Sane - I think you are making good progress. Please let me know the outcome of your actions.

Why Is It?
...that the trackball for the Atari 5200 is so well made but their joystick is not?

MAME Reviews

One thing has not changed in my absence and that is my love for MAME. While I have bought most of the compilation packages out there (just something about playing classic games on my big screen TV), I still come back to MAME. And with my trusty Devastator II controller, I always have fun. So here are a few more reviews for you. Check out my Arcade Reviews section where I have more than 100 different reviews up.



(Just another day in the underworld)

Satan's Hollow

From the first time you hear the music to the big battle with Satan, the game has a definite draw to it. Maybe it is the bad boy in you that cannot resist a game called Satan's Hollow. Maybe it is the good boy in you that wants to beat the devil. Whatever it is, the game is addictive. Almost sinfully addictive.

The game is basically a variation of Galaxian. You have creatures at the top that swoop down on you. Actually it is more like Phoenix as you also have a shield. What is nice about this shield is that you have a gauge that shows how much of it has been used. You start off with 15 points in the shield and it recharges once you quit using it. So watch out as it goes down because once it is out, you will be suseptable to attacks.



(Beware of his fiery breath, it's deadly!)



(He looks small but he packs a mean pitchfork.)

One part of the game that separates it from the other similar games is the bonus level. You need to build a bridge across the river of fire to get to the bonus level. There you are confronted by a demon who is very fast, but not too hard to beat. I found that if you start shooting right before the music ends, you can usually get him. You will then get one thousand points for killing him plus a thousand for each level you completed. These come in the form of flags. What I really like about this is not only do you have to build this bridge but the fireballs that the demons throw will burn parts of your bridge and you will then have to repair it. But for some reason, the flames from Satan do not hurt it. Go figure that one out.

Another thing to watch for is that some demons will steal your ship and fly off with it. You must may close attention to this or you will lose a ship. All you need to do is shoot the creature or kill it with your shield and the ship returns. Like the bugs in Donkey Kong 3, this is a quick way to lose a life.

Overall, the game is alot of fun. It is similar to many games from that era (Galaxian, Galaga, Phoenix, Eagle, etc...) but it also has enough unique items to make it stand out. And with the great music (Flight of the Valkyries by Wagner) and your chance to battle Satan, it is a game that will possess you.



(Screens do not show up well for this game.)

Discs of Tron

One of my all-time favorite arcade games is Disc of Tron. While most people remember and love the original Tron game (with the light cycle game being the one that sticks out in most people's minds), I preferred this pseudo sequel. While it plays fine at home, this is a game that needs to be played on the original machine. The controls are just right and the sit down cabinet is truly immersive. But if you cannot find one (and they are quite hard to find), then the MAME version will do fine.

The game involves a one on one duel between yourself and another person. But this one does not involve guns, rather you throw discs. You can carry up to three discs which can be thrown at once or you can slowly throw them. Your goal is to knock the other guy off his platform before he knocks you off. At the same time, he is trying to knock you off your platform. A simple game but it can be quite challenging, especially on later levels.

While throwing discs is the bulk of the game, there is also a few other things your character can do. As the game moves on, there will be two platforms that you can jump to. Trust me, if you stay on one platform too long, you will get fried. You need to keep bouncing around like an excited monkey to survive. You also have a shield that you can use to stop an incoming disc. At the arcade, I use it more as it is easy to reach. At home on my Devastator II controller, it is harder to reach. I learn to do without as it means taking my hands off either the joystick or the spinner.

As you progress through levels, you will find walls in your way and other obstacles. They make the game more challenging. But the core of the game remains the same. What really makes the game is the futuristic graphics and the sound. From the computer voice that taunts you to the catchy music, you are immersed in the game. This is even more true in the environmental version that you can occasionally find at the arcades.

One of the biggest keys to success is learning to bounce the discs off the walls. On the early levels, you can just throw the discs at your opponent and beat him. But on the later levels, you will need to learn to ricochet them off the walls to catch him off guard. Most times it is the disc coming back that will kill him and not the one headed towards him. Also, you need to gauge when to throw your discs. Just tossing all three of them at once is a recipe for disaster. If you can keep one in reserve, you have a better chance. Sometimes a disc will only stun an opponent. If you have another to throw, you can defeat him.

While most people remember the original Tron game, I find this one more enjoyable. I would have to say it is in my top ten favorite classic arcade game. A simple game that will challenge you and make you want to play one more game to break your high score.

Visual Pinball Review

Yes, I am still a big Visual Pinball fan! While a new pinball simulator has come out called Future Pinball, Visual Pinball is still where its at. Future Pinball still needs some work and it takes a very powerful computer to play it. Anyway, here is another review for you pinball fans out there.



Galaga Pinball

This is a original machine that was inspired by the arcade game. The authors are Luxor and Mitchell (sound like a Country duo) and they do an excellent job with the table. If you like the arcade game, chances are you will also like their pinball game.

The first thing you will notice is the table is both very dark and also quite colorful. There are many graphics from the arcade game that adds to the table. You will also notice on the side of the table is your score and the high score. If you read any of the other reviews, you will know that I like high scores. One of the best parts of pinball is making the high score and having it there for everyone to admire. And under those you will see they borrowed a page from the arcade game. You have the Fired/Hit/Ratio just like the arcade game. While not a big part of the game, it is the little touches like this that really add to the game.

The pinball is nothing special. It plays smooth and there is a fair amount to do. But it is nothing that stands out. But what really makes this a great table is the use of sound effects. A big problem that many people have with Visual Pinball is they overuse the sound effects. But this table is probably as close as you can get to a perfect balance of sound effects. Every one fits right and adds to the atmosphere. I applaud them on a great job.

About the only gripe I have with the table is the targets. They have the word Galaga as targets, broken into two letters per target. Personally, I would rather see the aliens as targets but it is a very minor thing. It is pretty funny as you knock down a few targets and get left with either "Ga" or "La". One could take this for baby talk or the abbreviations for Louisiana and Georgia. Either way it is pretty funny in an unintentional way.

The table is really fun to play and the sound effects are the best part. If you ever plan on making a pinball table, you should take a serious look at this one and see it done right.

Conclusion

While it took over a year for this issue to come out, I can honestly say another issue will be out sooner. How soon, I have no idea. This issue came out of the blue. I was thinking about doing one when I got a generous donation from a reader of the newsletter named John. He thanked me for doing Retrogaming Times and it made me want to do an issue. While I now have banner ads that are paying for the site and the traffic to the site is higher than ever (had to move to another service provider with more bandwidth), it did touch me.

Look for an issue of Bit Age Times to be up shortly. I am still working on it. Well, it has been fun and I hope to see you all soon! If you want to send submissions, I will keep them until I decide to do another issue. Enjoy this one and keep gaming!

-[Tom Zjaba](#)

(This issue was done while listening to a bunch of country songs. My wife has gotten big into country and it is starting to affect me. Songs that I listened to while writing this include - "Red Neck Woman" by Gretchen Wilson, "How Do You Get So Lonely" by Blaire Larsen, "Anything But Mine" by Kenny Chesney and "Ride a Cowboy" from Big and Rich.)

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