

# **Retrogaming Times**

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## **Table of Contents**

- 01. Introduction**
- 02. Video Game Hunter**
- 03. WOW Moments**
- 04. IPAD Reviews**
- 05. Video Game Stuff**
- 06. Conclusion**

## **Introduction**

I told you I would be back next month! I am just as surprised by this as you are, but there is a certain excitement to be writing RT again. I do know that this time, I will not limit myself to just classic era games (the pre Nintendo games). Expanding to later games will keep things fresher for me. As much as I like Pac-Man, there is only so much one person can say about the game before it gets tiring. So look for mention of Ipad games, Steam games and yes, classic games. While the newsletter is called Retrogaming Times, a more accurate title would be Gaming Time. But I don't feel like starting a new newsletter.

## **Video Game Hunter**

If you collect games, you will get to a point where you find very little new at the flea markets and thrift stores. Today, you can just hop on ebay and buy any game you want. And if you wait long enough, you will get it at a good price. But back when I was collecting, there was no ebay. The internet was small and quite expensive (there was a time when you paid by the hour, so you had to be selective on your surfing, not to mention the slow and I mean slow dial up). So you had to think of ways to find carts. There weren't any video game shows yet, so one way to buy games that you didn't have was to run an ad in the newspaper. That is what I did when I found I kept getting duplicates. How many ETs does one man need?

There was a paper that came out weekly called the Trade n Times and it offered a lower cost for advertising than the daily newspaper. I bought an ad and ended up running it for a few years. I still remember the first collection I bought off someone. I received a call from a man that had about 150 Atari 2600 and Atari 7800 games for sale. He said they were all loose but he had the instruction manuals for most the games. I said it sounded good and we planned on meeting at my comic store.

He arrived with a large box filled with carts as he promised. He also had an Atari 7800 system that was included. I was still a novice collector and while I had a few Atari 2600 systems, this was my first Atari 7800. I looked over the carts and noticed there were almost 50 different Atari 7800 games and a little over 100 different Atari 2600 games, including some that I never heard of before. We talked a little and I told him how I was collecting the systems and how this was the first Atari 7800. He was happy that the system was going to someone who would play it and offered me the whole collection for \$50.00. I agreed and paid him. He said goodbye to his system and headed out.

For the next few weeks, I felt like a kid. My only exposure to the Atari 7800 was seeing a handful of games for sale at an Atari computer store that I bought my Atari ST computer at a few years earlier. While I found later than few of the games had alot of value, I felt differently as I was finally able to play some really close to arcade versions of Centipede, Dig Dug, Ms. Pacman, Galaga, Robotron 2084 (which you could use both joysticks to control if you hooked it up right), Joust and one of my favorite arcade games that was not available on other platforms, Food Fight! I also discovered some new games that were fun like Dark Chambers, Scrapyrd Dog and the very unique Ninja Golf.

I was also able to add some new Atari 2600 games to my collection and found one expensive game that I was able to trade for the tabletop games that I was also collecting. The game was Shuttle Orbiter. When I talked about the find on a newsgroup, I was flooded with trade offers for the game and after playing it and finding it was not that great (I collected more for gameplay than value), I weighed the different trade offers and ended up getting three nice tabletop games (for people who don't know what they are, they look like miniature arcade machines). They may have gotten the better of that trade, but I was able to get

some nice items for my collection and still had a ton of great games to play!

## WOW Moments



When I was growing up, one of my passions was playing Dungeons & Dragons. While I liked board games, it was ability to change the game and make it your own that appealed to me. And like many D&Ders, I longed for a video game version of the game. While they had an official game for the Intellivision, I found the game to be lacking. The only other close games were Adventure for the Atari 2600 and Venture for the arcade and later, Colecovision. But neither offered the team play and different characters that made Dungeons & Dragons the game that it was. But then I found a game that took me closer to playing Dungeons & Dragons than any other video game and created a WOW moment for me.

A year earlier, my brother and I received an Odyssey 2 as a Christmas gift. I asked for an Atari 2600 as it was the system that all my friends had and I could swap carts with them, but I received the Odyssey 2 instead. It was an overlooked system and one that I only found one other person who owned. But it did have some good games and one of those was Quest for the Rings. While it came in an imposing box that was filled with a gameboard, pieces and other stuff, it was the game that I wanted. I don't think I ever used the gameboard.



While the graphics were nothing special, it was the ability to play two players at the same time and the ability to choose which character you wanted to be that was a true WOW moment for me! In all two player games up to this point, you never had any choice in what character you were. It was almost always the first person was the red guy and the second person was the blue guy or something like this. But in this game you could choose from four character - a warrior who wielded a magic sword, a wizard who threw spells, a phantom who could walk through walls and a changeling who could turn invisible. Each person could choose who they wanted to be and this was truly unique at the time. Did you want a warrior and a wizard? Or maybe a changeling and a wizard? Or two warriors? The choice was yours and made each game unique. What was also cool was there were different was the fact that you were on an actual quest. You had to find ten rings and get out of the dungeon. There were also four different kinds of monsters to fight, with the dragons being the most fearsome.

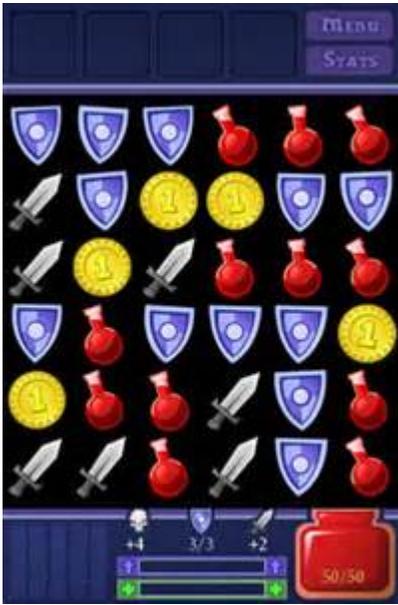


My friends and I spent hours playing this game and while it did not replace Dungeons & Dragons, it did at least give us hope that a video game version of our game would arrive one day. Yes, Quest for the Rings was a big step forward in two player games and for D&D inspired video games and it was one of those WOW moments for me.

## IPAD Reviews

I will start off my first IPAD review with my all-time favorite IPAD game (or app as they are called, but to me they will always be games) and one that is a classic video game.

### Dungeon Raid



I have logged more hours on this game than any game I have ever played and that includes some games that I have been playing for decades (like Crazy Climber and Robotron 2084). This game is so addictive that I find myself playing it almost daily. And since it is cheap (\$2.99 when not on sale), I have easily got my money's worth (or you can say it has cost me hundreds of hours).

The gameplay is simple in that it is much like any other match three game. Your goal is to match three of the same items to make them go away and give you points. But it is more than just clearing the board and scoring points, you are building up your abilities. And that is where the game gets interesting. It offers you tons of different possibilities for how you build your character. So it is a RPG built into a match three game. I know other games have done this before, Puzzle Quest for instance. But what sets this one apart is how much customization is offered and also how quickly the game goes. It is a great play at the doctor's office or on the bus kind of game.



There are four different items for you to match - swords that damage your enemy, potions that refill your hit points, shields that build up your protection and coins that fill your coffers. As you collect a set amount of shields or coins, you will build up and once it is filled, you will get your choice of one of three bonuses. These can range from additional hit points, weapons that do more damage, better armor or special abilities. The special abilities are where the game gets really interesting. You can have up to four of these and you must put some thought into which ones you select as they become available. Some help you fill up your meters quicker with abilities like double coins for a turn or grab all shields on the screen. Others help you battle the skulls (which are the enemy in this game) or avoid them. These can include teleportation or turn all skulls into swords. You can only use the abilities once per so many turns (it starts off once each 15 turns or 25 turns) but you can get these down with bonuses. This is where the skill and some luck is involved. You have no control over which special abilities will become available or when, so you have to decide if you want to take the first ones that come your way or wait for better ones that may or may not show up.

The only enemy is skulls that slowly get stronger with more hit points and dealing more damage. They also become more plentiful as you move on. There are boss skulls that have special abilities such as throwing other skulls for more damage or poisoning your character. These take a lot more hit points to kill and can be a real pain, especially later when you end up with a few on the board at once. While I wish there were a bigger variety of creatures to fight, this is a minor gripe in an otherwise incredible game.

If you have an apple device (not sure if the game has been ported to the android market) and a three bucks to spend, I can say that this game is well worth it. Just be ready to become less productive.

### Activision Anthology



My second review is for Activision Anthology, a series that has been ported to just about every system since the Playstation 1 days. There is not much to say about the selection of games as I am sure they are not much different than the one you bought for your PS2 or XBOX or Gameboy or whatever. Just like the rest, this one features the Atari 2600 versions of 45 different games from the Activision catalog as well as Imagic games and at least two unreleased game (Thwocker and Kabobber). You will find all your favorites here including Pitfall, Megamania, Freeway, Barnstormers, River Raid and more.



The biggest question I had about this collection was how well would it play on a touch screen? While some games converted to the IPAD have been improved by the touch screen (Plants vs Zombies being one), others have been hindered (Pac-Man). While I can say here most games play as good as the console version. Some like Kaboom play better, at least in my opinion. I did far better on this than I ever did on the PS2. While playing it on an Atari 2600 with a paddle is the best way to experience this game, this version comes in a close second. I also found that I did better with games like Plaque Attack and Oink. Other games like Pitfall and Keystone Kapers took a few times to get used to, but once I did I was doing fine. You have choices of how you want to control the game from touch to a D-pad to tilting, so between the choices you will find one that works for you.



This has alot of the features that other versions had like ability to unlock patches, put up high scores and having the manuals available to read as well as 3D versions of the boxes and carts to look at. I also like that the television in the room will show what cart you stopped on, so you can get a basic idea what the game looks like.

The initial download is free and comes with one game, Kaboom. You can then buy the games either in groups of 11 games for \$2.99 with similar games together or you can buy all the games for \$6.99, which is quite a deal! Or if you are really cheap, you can wait for the next sale. Almost all apps will eventually go on sale and you may be able to get all the games for half as much or less. But having the ability to play 45 Activision classics on the go for \$6.99 is a deal! And if you have an ICADÉ, then you really need this as it

is compatible with the awesome little device (if you don't know what an ICADE is, google it). My only gripe with the collection is one that I have had with every Activision Anthology collection, I wish they would offer the other Activision and Imagic games that came out for systems like the Intellivision. I would love to be able to play games like Dreadnaught Factor, Microsurgeon, Tropical Trouble, Truckin, Dracula and others in a collection like this. And I would love to play some of the games in this collection that also appeared on the Colecovision with improved graphics (like Keystone Kapers). I would easily pay an additional \$5.00 for this or more. But I doubt that I will ever see it.

## **Video Game Stuff**

Here is from some emails that I received. This is where I will mention video game shows, items for sale, cool links and stuff like that. Send them to me and I will place them (my email address is at the bottom of every page of this website, which brings me a steady flow of spam).

### **Too Many Games Show**

I been to these when they were called the Phillyclassic and I had a great time! This one is at Greater Philadelphia Expo Center in Oaks, PA. It will take place June 14th to 16th and will feature tons of vendors selling classic to modern games. There will be chiptune musicians playing music from your favorite games and Indy Game Showcase. If you want more info, check out the site at <http://toomanygames.com>.

### **DigDug Tragedy**

Here is a cute video I found on Youtube that features the arcade game, DigDug. Enjoy - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DG2zaSVvG84>

## **Conclusion**

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.

Here is the end of another newsletter. I will try to make it a little bigger next month and maybe add a comic strip or two. Check back in a month and see if I can make it three in a row!

[Tom Zjaba](#) (Who did this while listening to the Wallflowers, George Harrison and Gary US Bonds)

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