Retrogaming Times

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Missed Endorsement Opportunities

During the 1980's, a few video game characters rose to superstardom ranks. Pacman, Q*Bert and Donkey Kong went on to have their famous likeness put on everything from puzzles to lunch boxes to stuffed animals. This led to many other game characters getting some deals, with Pitfall Harry, Centipede and Space Invaders being among the others. But for every person who was able to reap the rewards of stardom and ride the gravy train, there were dozens left behind. No matter how famous they were, they did not share in the payday and were left with their hands out. Here is the story of some of the endorsement deals that did not pan out. Part of the blame could be the Great Video Game Crash that killed many deals. Blame also could be put on bad agents, who did not know how to sell their clients. Also blame could be put on the game characters themselves, who often thought they were too big for some deals. No matter who is to blame, there is a lesson to be learned here. If you are in a position to make a big payday, strike while the iron is hot. Fame is a fleeting thing and the longer you wait, the better the chance that you will miss out on it.

Pengo for Popsicle - What would be a better team-up than a cold weather bird and a cold treat? Looked like a match made in heaven and it almost came about. But the biggest problem is that Pengo is a penguin and they are strictly fish eaters. One of his requests is to make a fish flavored popsicle, which ended up tasting as disgusting as it sounds. They tried to test market it, but it bombed horribly. Out of over a thousand taste testers, there were a total of two others who liked the product, namely Chilly Willy and Opus.

Sinistar for Slim Jims - How do you crave the hunger of Sinistar? With Slim Jims of course! That was the proposed slogan for the meat snack. With Sinistar pronouncing he hungered and then being fed Slim Jims, he would be satisfied and leave. Everything seemed ready to go. Sinistar even liked the taste of Slim Jims. But there was one

problem, his hunger could not be satisfied. They fed him hundreds upon hundreds of Slim Jims and he still hungered. When they ran out, he began eating the camera crew and soon anarchy broke out. They were finally able to lure him back into space with a giant Slim Jim and he has not been heard of since.

Mappy for Cheetos - Before Chester Cheetah became the "Dangerously Cheesy" spokesperson for Cheetos snacks, there was an offer to Mappy the Police Mouse. The commercial went something like this "Of all the treasures the Cat Gang has stolen, one stands as the most prized of all to Mappy the Police Mouse, Cheetos Brand Cheese Snacks. So good, so tasty, they are almost criminal." Word is that Mappy was very tough to work with and by the time they finally came to terms, the crash came about and they soon dumped him. He later went on to star in a very weak sequel, Hopping Mappy.

Worst Atari 2600 Games

By The Video Game Critic

Everybody loves the Atari 2600 console, but you can't deny that it has its share of bad games. Okay, more than it's share. As a reviewer I have great fun trashing these games and exposing them for what they are. Here are a few reviews for bad Atari 2600 games.

Laser Blast (Activision 1981) F

Sure, there are a few people out there who like this game, but trust me, it’s 100% nostalgia. It has to be, because Laser Blast is such a bad game. Everything about it is poor: the plain graphics, minimal sound, and mind-numbing, repetitive gameplay. You control a flying saucer at the top of the screen, shooting cannons that crawl across the bottom in groups of three. You can’t even get off a shot until the cannons have completely moved onto the screen, which is irritating. Your enemies shoot solid-line lasers there's no way to dodge these things, so the only way to evade harm is to keep moving. Too bad your ship comes to a dead stop whenever you fire. You can shoot straight down or diagonally, but the sticky controls often cause you to shoot in the wrong direction. There’s little strategy as you systematically shoot each three cannons that march out, until you just get sick of the whole thing. If Laser Blast was a food, it would be boiled cabbage - it has no flavor. It may well be the worst Activision game ever made.
Recommended variation: 4
1 player

Skeet Shoot (Apollo 1981) F
You know, back in the early 80s, some game companies would put out any piece of crap to make a buck, and Apollo's Skeet Shoot is a prime offender. With ludicrous graphics and reprehensible gameplay, this cart is borderline offensive. Your goal is to shoot as many "clay pigeons" (gray disks) as you can out of the air. It's hard to imagine a game with worse graphics than this. Are you telling me that those ugly shapes at the bottom of the screen are supposed to be a man with a gun? The targets are launched at three different angles from the center of the screen. You can aim in five directions, but aiming diagonally is terribly difficult, even with a good joystick. There are two target speeds, with slow being far too easy, and fast being so quick you can't even react in time. Skeet Shoot has 17 useless variations, but once you've played one, you've played them all. This game is so bad that I'd be embarrassed to be caught playing it.
Recommended variation: 1B
1 or 2 players

Sssnake (Data Age 1982) F
Anybody still wondering why the video game crash of 1983 took place needs to look no further than this game. This is the kind of trash game companies were spewing out by the dozens. As far as the gameplay goes, Sssnake amounts to a poor man's Centipede. Your cannon moves around the perimeter of a small box in the center of the screen. The object is to shoot creatures running around the screen while avoiding the snakes. The snakes look like dotted lines, and shooting them has unpredictable results. Sometimes they become smaller and sometimes they split, but mostly your shots just go right through them and nothing happens at all. The other creatures are pixelated blobs. Control is awkward, to say the least. This looks like an unfinished project. It's got to be one of the sssloppiest games I've ever seen.
1 player

Airlock (Data Age 1982) F
The premise of Airlock is to escape from a flooding submarine. It's not a bad idea, but the execution stinks big time. This game could be the poster child for the 1983 video game crash; it resembles an unfinished 1979 high school programming assignment. Lets start with the putrid graphics. There are five blocky platforms in what appears to be the most generic platform game ever. Your man is a static stick figure who must jump over certain blocks while grabbing rectangles that are supposed to be keys. Runaway torpedoes move side to side across each floor, but for some strange reason, these torpedoes are shaped like your man from the waist up! Worst of all, instead of having water gradually fill the lower areas, entire floors simply turn blue at predetermined time intervals - ugh!! And then

there's the poor control, which causes you to get constantly get caught up on the barriers. The sound effects are practically non-existent, and there's no score either - you either escape or you don't. Airlock barely qualifies as a game. Did Data Age really think the fancy title screen would make up for the appalling gameplay? Recommended variation: 3B 1 player

ET The Extra-Terrestrial (Atari 1982) F

I can remember all the way back to 1982 when I got ET as a surprise Christmas present! I couldn't believe how lucky I was to get such an expensive game! And when I saw that awesome title screen and heard the ET theme, I thought for sure I had struck gold. I played it for days, and somehow convinced myself it was a good game. Denial is an ugly thing. Twenty years later, I've come to terms with my feelings. The truth is, ET is incredibly frustrating and almost completely devoid of fun. The object is to avoid bad guys while collecting phone parts hidden in pits. The problem is, these pits are EVERYWHERE! You can barely move without accidentally keep falling into one of these annoying things! Is this supposed to be fun? Who play-tested this crap? I've seen the movie, and I don't remember ET falling into ONE pit, much less 100 of them! When you're not in a pit, a symbol at the top of the screen indicates what you can do (call Elliott, eat candy, locate piece, etc.). The game has some nice animation, but gameplay glitches, poor design, and confusing controls make it a struggle from start to finish. This was obviously a rush job. Atari was ultimately forced to bury its inventory of ET cartridges in a concrete landfill. Believe me, they did us all a favor.
1 player

For more classic reviews, check out The Video Game Critic at www.videogamecritic.net.

RETROGAMING COMMERCIAL VAULT

by Adam King

Greetings, Gamers. Once again we dip into the 'Vault for another pair of classic gaming ads. You'll notice a slight name change to the column starting this month. I did it mainly so people would get this column mixed up with a section on my NES webpage, which has Nintendo commercials.

Anyway, this month I'm covering the Intellivision, and I'm spotlighting a pair of commercials featuring George Plimpton.

Intellivision Space Games

There's no doubt that while the Intellivision had excellent sports games, Atari had them beat when it came to action/arcade games. Then in 1982, with a science-fiction resurgence in play, both companies produced space games. Atari put out ads saying they had the best games, saying "nobody compares to Atari." In this ad from Mattel, a nerdy kid says that line, only for good ol' George to come up and compare them to Intellivision. As Plimpton shows off the space line-up, including Space Battle, Space Armada, and Astrosmash, the kid is shocked, saying, "I didn't know!"

The ad closes with the kid enjoy the INTV line-up while Plimpton says, "The Intellivision Space Games from Mattel Electronics. Once you compare, you'll know."

"Let me shows you who has the REAL space games."

It's like he discovered the Holy Grail.

"I'm so sorry I doubted you."

Intellivision Rebate

This time we find Plimpton talking about a rebate offer Mattel had during late 1982. Of course he delivers his message the only way he knows how - by standing in a tiger's cage!

"The last time Intellivision had a $50 rebate, I refused to do it. And they're trying to persuade me to do another one. Well, perhaps I was a bit hasty. After all the Intellivision is a marvelous system and $50 is a big rebate. So buy an Intellivision before November 28* and get $50 back from Mattel Electronics. And hurry! Can I go now!"

*Offer expired.

Watch out, George, there's something behind that screen.

He's a brave man for doing this.

"Get $50 back, and that's no lion."

"Tell me why I'm doing this again."

Time to sign off for another 30 days. The Retrogaming Commercial Vault CD is coming slowly but surely. My goal is to have it completed by January 1, with 70 ads. If you have any questions, comments, suggestions, etc, e-mail me at Hal_3000@rocketmail.com and I may add you to my mailing list to get updates.

BTW, please don't ask me to put NES ads on the disc. You can find those at my Nintendo website, NES Times (come.to/nestimes). Until next time, keep gaming.

WRITING YOUR OWN GAMES

by Tonks

Debates continued all the time amongst my friends and I about which video game machine was the best. (Not much has changed hey?!?) But there was always one way in which my humble Vic 20 always won out, along with other home computers of the day. That is creating your own games. This is something that was just impossible with an Atari VCS or Colecovision. But with the Vic 20 and its built in BASIC the only limit you had was your imagination (Oh, and the pathetic 3.5K memory).

As I said in my article last month, my friends and I were always busy typing in listings from magazines. As we became more skilled at programming we would then start to make little changes to the games we typed in. We would make things a bit faster, change the sprites a bit or add some sound effects if there weren't originally any there. But then one day a friend of mine attempted what we all thought was the impossible, writing his own game. Oh we of little faith!! To the surprise of us all it worked, and the game turned out to be a pretty good one too.

Well we were all very impressed and very inspired. So we took up the challenge to start writing our own games. The Vic 20 was well supported with many books about how to program. Plus our little "user group" was always there to lend a hand if you got stuck on something. Among us all we produced some fun little games. Sure, none of them would have challenged the likes of Jeff Minter and Tom Griner, but we were immensely proud of our little achievements.

It was during the early days of learning to write my own games that I learnt a very important thing about using computers - What ever you are doing, remember to SAVE!!!!

I set about writing a version of Pong. I wrote out a fair bit of the program on paper before inputting anything on the computer. Then when I started actually typing it up on the computer I got on a real roll. In my enthusiasm I typed in "RUN" to see what my program was like. The "Pong" screen appeared with two bats. It looked perfect. Then the ball

appeared. It still looked perfect. I was just so excited. But then it all went horribly wrong. The screen jerked and suddenly went all yellow. There was no curser, no writing at all. My game had crashed and I had forgot to save it. I had no choice but to turn off my Vic and start all over again.

And by the way, I did redo the whole game, remembering to save it, but it never did work properly and I ended up just giving in. On to some reviews...

BLACK HOLE

Here is a real technical achievement for the Vic 20. Tom Griner is one of the programmers along with Jeff Minter that really pushed the Vic 20 to its limits, often doing things many thought was impossible on such a basic machine. Here in Black Hole Tom Griner has produced some very good 3D wire frame graphics. His programming efforts here earn him a huge 10 out of 10. As for the actual game, it is a pretty good shoot-em-up based on two classic games, Space War and Asteroids. You control a small ship and must destroy the aliens that appear while also trying to avoid the gravity of the sun at the centre of the screen. Pushing up on the joystick enables you to thrust forward, while left and right rotates your ship. The fire button…..fires your lasers. Black Hole is a lot of fun, but does lack variety. A bit more variety and it would have easily made it into the "must have" category.
My Score - 8/10

DEMON ATTACK

The famous Atari VCS game is converted to the Vic 20 brilliantly. It has lost none of its graphical splendour or marvellous game play at all. For the few who have not played Demon Attack, it is a shoot-em-up with similar elements to the likes of Galaxian and Phoenix. The graphics are nicely detailed. Often the Vic 20 can be guilty of having blocky graphics or stretched sprites. But Demon Attack is nice sharp. Game play is pretty relentless. The demons constantly attack. The more you shoot and kill, others just appear to take their place. When the demons fire at you, watch out. They don't let loose just one little missile, but around a dozen at a time pour down on you. When you finish a few games of Demon Attack your trigger finger knows it has had a real workout - but it will be worth every minute.
My Score - 9/10

GOLD FEVER

Gold Fever is a fun platform game that has some similarities to Lode Runner. You need to run around the screen collecting gold bars that are scattered about, all the while avoiding the weird looking enemies that are pursuing you. You climb up and down the ladders to get to the higher or lower platforms. Pressing the fire button allows your man to jump over the enemies. This isn't as easy as it seems. Once you have collected all the gold, a red door appears taking you to the next level. The graphics are colourful and reasonably well defined. Movement is a bit jerky and that can become annoying. This certainly isn't a patch on the brilliant Lode Runner, but it should keep platform fans occupied for quite a while. By the way, what are those enemies? All I have is the cart with no instructions, so I have no documentation to tell me. They kind of look like watch dogs. What do others think?
My Score - 6/10

RAID ON FORT KNOX

This is one of my personal favourites. I have spent literally hours playing this. Raid On Fort Knox is a maze game where you must break into Fort Knox and steal all the gold. Making your job more difficult are the constantly patrolling watchdogs. If they catch you, you're dead! The game starts off easily enough. Just three gold bars and one watchdog. But as you clear each level, the amount of gold bars to collect increases, as do the amount of watchdogs. The sound really adds to this game. The constant background sound is a little like the sound the ghosts make in Pacman. When ever you pick up a gold bar the sound goes up a few tones and gets faster. This adds to the overall tension and really gets the blood pumping. Graphics are simple but effective and it all moves along at a great pace, even when there are heaps of watchdogs pursuing you.
My Score - 9/10

SATELLITE PATROL
At first glance this game doesn't seem like much. The graphics are blocky and the sound minimal. But as is often the case with classic games, the game play shines through. Satellite patrol is an original game which draws a lot of influence from two of my favourite games, Asteroids and Time Pilot. This is a shoot-em-up game where you must destroy enemy satellites as well as many asteroids that fly past. That is where the obvious Asteroids influence comes into it. But you don't just stay on a static screen, but rather the screen scrolls in all eight directions as you chase down the enemy satellites. That is where the Time Pilot influence comes into it. If you are a fan of Asteroids or Time Pilot then you will love this game. The graphics are blocky, but they are very colourful. The scrolling is nice with just a bit of slowdown when there are heaps of asteroids on the screen at once. My Score - 8/10

The Many Faces of...Archon & Boulder Dash

by Alan Hewston

This month we finish up our double shot of the best home computer games from 1983 with 2 classics originally made on the Atari home computers that most everyone has seen or heard of, even if on the NES. Oops - I erred again, since every version of "Boulder Dash" says ’84. Most of this month’s 7 reviews are available only on disk, or fairly rare as carts - so many of you’ll need to fire up those emulators.

The Many Faces of...Archon

A head-to-head competition using the forces of good (White) versus evil (Black), blended perfectly as part strategy board game & part arcade shoot’em up. The board is similar to chess, with each army on one side, but the grid is 9X9 with 25 of the squares always white, 25 always black & the remaining 31 squares, called luminous - changing with the ebb and flow of time. But first we’re introduced by names to the 18 characters as they take the battlefield in formation. There are 8 unique mythical or magical figures. The goal is to eliminate all enemy pieces or control all 5 power squares. These 5 squares are located at the middle square along each of the 4 board edges & one in the center square. Thus, 1 is on the Wizard’s White square, 1 on the Sorceress’s Black square and the other 3, across the luminous central row. Light Forces: Wizard, Unicorn, Archer, Golem, Valkyrie, Djinni, Phoenix & Knight. Dark: Sorceress, Basilisk, Manticore, Troll, Shape Shifter, Dragon, Banshee and Goblin. Every piece has its own unique set of traits and only the pawns (Goblins & Knights), and also the Sorceress & Wizard are an equal match for each other. The strategy screen is a top view of the board where you either move 1 piece each turn, or cast one of 7 magic spells via your Wizard or Sorceress. Spells are: teleport, heal, shift time, exchange, summon elemental, revive and imprison. Each piece has a means of travel (ground, air or teleport) and some movement range (in squares). Ground movers cannot pass through an occupied square, and when you end your turn on an opposing piece - you engage in BATTLE. The strategy board opens up into the full screen arena, putting the pieces at opposite sides along with different colored & sized barriers, anywhere from a few to a couple dozen. These barriers may seem frustrating, but are critical to play as they provide a place to hide and add randomness in their coming and going, and how much they will get in your way, block shots, appear to grab hold of you and finally to bounce you backwards off them. The square’s color is very important as it provides bonus power to the combatant of that color. For luminous squares, the power bonus varies from a small amount when the color is Green or Magenta, to the full bonus 2 turns later when completely White or Black. Luminous squares remain one of the 6 color shades one turn for each player. You begin each game at a middle color & work towards White or Black and then reversing back and forth ad infinitum. In the arena, pieces differ in their movement speed; body (target) size; weapon type (swing, throw or other); weapon size; weapon speed; weapon damage inflicted; stamina (displayed as a power indicator bar); weapon re-load time, and some unique attack and/or combined defensive skills. The composite skills and capabilities of "light" and "dark" forces are considered equal, but

again, nearly every character is unique.

"Archon" makes a great choice for classic or neoclassic (NES) VG tournament play at conventions or game parties. No live competition . . . no problem . . . because you can play a computer opponent & choose who moves first & who is light or dark. The CPU only has one skill level – but is fairly shrewd at strategy but somewhat predictable and only semi-decent as a combatant. Assuming that you can easily defeat your friends or the CPU, here are a few suggestions to bring you back for a greater challenge. Play left-handed; or never use "revive"; never use magic; never initiate a battle; or never initiate battle with a major piece; never use a major piece (die) in the arena; and combinations of these.

Arcade: None
Home versions: By Freefall Associates & distributed by Electronic Arts
First on the Atari 8 bit in ’83 by Jon Freeman, Paul Reiche III & Anne Westfall
Commodore 64 (‘83), Apple II (’84 Jim L. Nitchols), Sinclair Spectrum (’85)
Sequels: "Archon II" ’84 & later on all of the above systems.

Home Version Similarities: Except those in <>: all home versions have: two-player simultaneous joystick action <AP2>; intro musical score; individual character arrival (names & take their positions on the board); a demo where you can watch computer players for several moves; randomness in battle with changing barriers in the arena; audio queue when each weapon has reloaded; power bar indicator on screen; and the game could end in a draw after a complete 12 move luminous cycle without any battles.

Have Nots: Spectrum (NA)
The Sinclair Spectrum is the best classic system that I still don’t own. I recently noticed significant updates to this system’s large collection of games at the Worldofspectrum.org. My apologies to the large following of Speccy fans - as I’ve finally confirmed existence of these many faces, including: "Mario Bros", "Gyruss", "Spy Hunter", "Beamrider", "Pole Position", "Robotron 2084", "Burning Rubber", "Dragonfire" & "Space Shuttle JIS".

Bronze Medal: Apple II (35 or 37)
My first reaction back in college was unimpressed - comparing it to the C64. The biggest drawback here is the Sound, which is adequate (5). The intro music is OK, but the effects are non-distinct – almost sounding alike. Some pieces constantly make sounds during battle, and those that sound bad are irritating. Fortunately, weapon re-load is audible, so not much loss to the game’s charm & re-playability. There is no music to conclude the match. Gameplay matches the Atari, as outstanding (9) & all versions are well done, with great game depth. This version probably has the best demo as the 2 computer opponents can fight quite a long battle each time. Addictiveness is pleasant (8), but I have subtracted a point due to poor programming of the collision detection, primarily of the Banshee & also the Phoenix. There may be others, but the perimeter/area weapons were poorly done – larger than what is visibly shown - making them too powerful and just plain unfair to those who are unsuspecting. On all versions, you can pause indefinitely by waiting when it is your turn to move. The Graphics are good enough (6) to see all the action, but the

luminous squares are crappy, not beautiful solid colors, but pixelated combinations of white, black, orange & blue. Very annoying trying to figure out where you are in the flow of time. Give us solid colors please! Controls are effective (7), and give you a choice of 1 or 2 players and also 1 or 2 joysticks and then a selection for both light & dark players and finally to select the keys on the keyboard for movement/firing. Once again, a casual fan (like me) cannot get my Apple II joystick to both move and fire - I must hold the stick between my knees, then hold one hand to move the stick and one to press the fire <Apple> button. Regardless, the analog control scheme makes the 8 directions hard to nail down, so you'll still be off and misfire often (ie like 5200 or Inty) – and in this game, you must be accurate or you may die before you get the second chance. For those with two sticks, properly working, Controls should only have the analog directional problem and be outstanding (9). Available only on disk.

Silver Medal: Atari 8 Bit (42)
My first reaction is – this original version is fine, but could have been improved. Gameplay is outstanding (9). Too bad there's only one computer skill level, and not a choice to watch (the demo) computer battle computer (for very long). Addictiveness is great (9), every game is unique, and there is so much variety, strategy and randomness from playing a different human player, and even from the computer. The Graphics are very good (7) and the combatants resemble fantasy creatures, but not too much detail or color. The pieces could be larger since the strategy board uses a small portion of the screen. Fortunately the arena is full screen. Sound is exciting (7) with a nice theme song and a full set of colorful audio effects. They are distinct (firing, re-loading, hitting, missing) but seem to lack emotion of those on the later released C64. The Controls are perfect (10). Available both on cart & disk. One of the best 2-player games ever on the Atari.

Gold Medal: Commodore 64 (45)
My first reaction was this is the greatest disk game I've ever loaded in a (jaw dropping) 13 seconds - made possible via the Vorpal loader. Seconds after typing in that Load"*",8,1 command, I could open my dorm room door and blast that awesome music (my favorite 8 bit score) down the hall - signaling another round of "Archon" battles would begin immediately. The first 2 students to take a break from studying would face off, H-T-H in the arena. That next generation of college students would have twice the fun with 4-player "Bomberman" battles, but that's another story. Scores and comments match the Atari, plus the Gameplay is outstanding (9) & the Addictiveness is great (9). The Graphics are sharper here (8), the best of all versions, but still the weakest feature in this game. Even more color & animation is possible. A post battle victory strut (ie like sacks or touchdowns in the NFL) would have been cool. Sound is superb (9), with the title track nearly a work of art. The effects are much better – with the crisp sound of a swing & a miss, or cha-ching! Metal connecting! Controls are perfect (10). Available only on disk. One of the best 2-player games ever on the C64.

Final notes: Simultaneous death by pawns is cool. Phoenix vs Phoenix battles are boring and there should be a law against such impudence.

The Many Faces of...Boulder Dash

Rockford says "Don't tap you're foot waiting for me!" He does just that whenever you're not moving him in search of the secret jewels of the caves. This "collect 'em up" plays somewhat like "Dig Dug", but is such a fast paced, action filled game that you might not realize it. There is less violence than "Dig Dug" because you have no weapon - but you still have rocks – boulders in this case, to drop on the bad guys. It's just as much fun, but requires a significant amount of strategy and planning to conquer each cave. There are often more enemies than you can defeat, so knowing the cavern and managing your resources is critical. Due to the fast pace of the action – you can be your own worst enemy – dropping everything on yourself, or getting trapped. Your enemies do not hunt you down, instead they blindly move only in open ground either ClockWise or CCW and follow the edge of the openings. You move L/R/U/D and move (dig) through the dirt - each space moved takes the same amount of time, regardless if you are digging or not, or collecting the diamonds. Collect the required number of diamonds remaining as show on-screen & then exit before time's up. Extra diamonds means even more (bonus) points getting you closer to earning an extra life, but don't be greedy. Opening up the space below a diamonds or boulders will bring them & everything above down until they stop falling.

Dash those boulders, which when hitting your enemies will either destroy them or cause a diamond explosion which fills that spot, plus the 8 around it – creating up to 9 diamonds. Hold the fire button and push a direction to grab a diamond or clear dirt next to your space or to push ONE boulder L/R. There are 3 start levels for each of caves A, E, I or M (ie 1, 6, 11 or 16), and levels 4 and 5 for Cave A, making 14 different starting points for your game. After completing Cave 20, move on to Cave 1 on the next level. Each cave is unique, exactly 2 screens wide, 2 screens tall, and the only randomness is from the amebas. The more you practice, the better you will master the skills required or at finding & perfecting a pattern for that cave. The game moves along quickly, so patterns are tedious, but sometimes effective.

Arcade: 1984 Exidy/Frist Star after already being a hit at home computers.
Home versions: most by First Star Software & Micro Fun
First in '84 on the Atari 8 bit by Chris Gray & Peter Liepa
Colecovision ('84, Chris Oberth), Commodore 64(Gray & Liepa '84), Apple II ('84 ?)
Sinclair Spectrum (Ariolasoft/EA by Front Runner software)
Sequels: Super Boulder Dash ('84 Electronic Arts), Boulder Dash II: Rockford's Revenge ('85 First Star), Boulder Dash Construction Kit ('86 First Star).

Home Version Similarities: Except those in <> all home versions have: great introductory music; a demo of Cave A <CV>; bonus lives every 2K; a timer for each level; # of remaining diamonds to collect; a chime when the exit door appears <AP2>; a warning when time is almost up; a key to abort the life/timer (R/S, Esc or *) if trapped; 2 players & 2 joysticks <AP2>; a high score <C64, Atari>; and a pause - space bar or on the CV use <0> & <8>.

Have Nots: Spectrum (NA)

Spectrum fans often list "Boulder Dash" in their top 10 lists. This is currently my most desired 8 bit system to acquire, but I doubt that'll ever happen. Until then, I'm happy to

mention what I can here.

Have Nots: Apple II (42 or 44)

My first reaction was the analog controls and internal sounds are the only drawbacks. The Gameplay is fantastic (9) on all home versions, with lots of game depth, action and creativity. The game start options for practicing are terrific. In the NES version, these are more creatively replaced with the very popular and even more addictive passwords. This is a collect'em up, action/adventure and puzzle game combined. The Controls are very nice (8), but if the joystick button works for you score it a (9). A point was deducted since fast action never works well with analog controls. Addictiveness is wonderful (9) with all the start levels to practice, but loose a point as grabbing dirt and moving the other way instantly is incredibly hard with analog. Graphics are superb (9) on all versions with great details & color aplenty. Animation is pretty decent and lots of boulders & enemies can be in flight simultaneously. Sound is effective (7) and does not detract from gameplay. The music & effects would be a little better on external speakers. The ameba noises are replaced by music here.
Available only on disk.

Silver Medal: Commodore 64 & Atari 8 Bit (46)

Great 3 way battle with these two just missing. All three medal winners have well done (9) Gameplay, awesome (10) Addicitveness. This is what defines re-playability, making us keep coming back game after game. Then the next night & the next and then years later to try again. Graphics are wonderful (9); Sound is pleasant (8) with nice echoes, fade in/outs & sufficient variety of effects. The intro music is nice, but what really kicks - is the cascade of boulders and/or diamonds crashing and exploding blending together and overlapping beautifully. Controls are perfect (10), but all versions will take some time getting used to the timing of the rapid movements.

Atari 8 bit

My first reaction was "is this the C64?" - sure enough these are equivalent versions - looking and sounding much the same. Available on disk, or on a rare but much sought after cart ($60).

Commodore 64

My first reaction back in '85 was to keep on coming back to play each level again and again until I beat it. Available only on disk, this game frequently ranks in top 10 lists for C64 fans. There are 50+ games in the C64's massive library that are either spin-offs, clones, home brews or created levels of this game or the BD Construction Kit.

Gold Medal: Colecovision (47)

My first reaction was excited by its graphic brilliance. Alas, this game is a bit rare & since it is really fun to play, you'll search long & hard - then pay $40+ for one. I played it via a Dreamcast emulator, but I don't think that hurts/helps these scores. I was tempted to drop the Addictiveness score a notch as the screen scrolling appears to be very jerky - but maybe that is due to the emulation. Even so, this version supposedly allows one to continue on the level just completed pressing <*> after the game is over - can't beat that. The Graphics are surely a work of art (10), with much detail, variety or colors and a really great 3-D look. This should make CV fans cry for other carts to have been so nicely done. If you cannot find this baby, be happy to play the other meal winners for now.

Thanks to those who helped me obtain "Archon" and/or "Boulder Dash" on disk - Tom McLaren (Apple II) & Steve Knox (Atari).

Come back next time for another 20th Anniversary tribute to 1983 in The Many Faces of "Montezuma's Revenge" on the Atari 8 bit, 2600, 5200, CV, Apple II & C64. Alan Hewston, who has never lost to a human playing "Archon" can be contacted at: Hewston95@NOSPAMstratos.net or see some of his site at http://my.stratos.net/~hewston95/VG/Hewston_vg.html

From Cleveland, the heart of Rock & Roll! & America's Roller Coast. Alan & Kathy

Hewston, Proud parents of almost 6 Yr. old Samantha who recently rode the "Raven", #1 Wooden coaster on the planet & almost 3 yr Timothy who is on that long road of potty training.

Sites of the Month

After a short hiatus, Sites of the Month returns. Here is the latest sites to check out:

Retrogames R Us
If you like to look at pictures, this is a good site for you. With cover scans of almost all the classic magazines, a great section for classic joysticks and more, this site gives you a bunch of cool stuff to look at. I especially liked the joysticks as you do not always see alot of attention given to the vast amount of controllers for the Atari 2600. Here is the link to the site:

http://retrogames-r-us.tripod.com/

Tolkien Computer Games
While not entirely classic, it is something that many classic gamers can relate with. Here is a place to find out about all the Tolkien inspired computer games. While most are homebrews, there is some very imaginative stuff here. If you are a fan of Lord of the Rings and the Hobbit, then check it out!

http://www.lysator.liu.se/tolkien-games/index.html

Letters to the Editor

Time for more questions from the readers of the newsletter (and some other emails that I get:

What happened to all the video games you had for sale on your website?

I had a person who has opened a store purchase them. While the deal is not complete yet, it should be soon. To be honest, I am glad to be out of selling games. It has gotten harder to replace them as I do not have as much time to search the flea markets and garage sales. Plus, the level of competition in the area has increased dramatically in the past few years. I used to be able to find stuff at the flea markets with little problem, but now there is a dozen people looking for the same stuff and it is a matter of luck to find anything. I used to never leave a flea market empty handed, but now I almost never find anything.

If the world was going to end and you had time to play one last game, what would it be?

To be honest, if the world was about to end, I would not be playing video games.

I really love Joust because of the two player mode. What other classic games have cool two player modes? Please no sports games.

Since you did not say any system, I will just list a handful for different systems and arcade games and you can decide if they are on a system want to get.

Atari 2600 - Warlords (great four player mode), Pong (what is a better two player game?)

Atari 7800 - Centipede, Joust, Asteroids (yes they have two player cooperative or competitive modes on both Centipede and Asteroids) and for fun, do two player Robotron where one person shoots and one person moves. Very fun and strange.

Odyssey 2-Quest for the Rings (probably the best two player game for a weak system)

Vectrex - Ripoff and Armor Attack (two great two player games)

Intellivision - Utopia (too fun for words)

Bally Astrocade - Incredible Wizard (or as it was known at the arcades, Wizard of Wor)

Arcade - Joust, Timber, Wizard of Wor, Ripoff, Armor Attack, Pong, Warlords, there are so many that I know I am forgetting and this does not count the Bit Age when you have Golden Axe, Simpsons and a ton of others.

Conclusion

Another issue in the can. The summer heat is almost gone and I am happy to see it go. Of course that means the chill of winter is around the corner. Brrrr. Check back next issue as I bring you another issue of classic enjoyment. By the way, if anyone would be kind enough to burn me a copy of the Intellivision emulator for the Dreamcast with games, I would be very appreciative. While I have most of the games (as well as both Intellivision Lives! CDs and even the Playstation compilation which is missing most of the games I really like <namely Diner, Thin Ice, Truckin, Dracula, Worm Whomper, the D & D games and Dreadnaught Factor>), I would rather play they on my 32 inch TV with my Dreamcast arcade joystick instead of the computer or with the less than enjoyable Intellivision controller (don't bother me with the you need to experience the games with the original controller to appreciate them, I have been playing Intellivision games for over 20 years on those awful controllers and I would much appreciate using my arcade joystick).

-Tom Zjaba

(This issue was done while listening to Jason Mraz, Boz Scaggs and Savage Garden).