TOMORROW'S HEROES RETROTIMES #23

The Newsletter for the Retro Gamer in All of Us

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Introduction

This issue is done in haste, so keep that in mind. The heat has been horrendous and my poor office is not air conditioned. Any spots you see in the newsletter are not tears of joy, but drops of sweat as I struggle in the heat to catch up. I have my handy pitcher of ice tea (extra strong to keep me awake) and my trusty fan. But fear not, as this month I have aid! First off, Alan returns with two articles, including an excellent one featuring Eyeball Benders! Also from abroad, Doug Saxon returns with an overseas article. Joining us this month is William Cassidy with an article. Add in the ever reliable and always enjoyable article from Fred Wagaman and we have a full cast! I will add a few of my own articles to round things out and we have the makings of another short, but sweet newsletter! So print this bad boy off and go sit near your air conditioner and read it. I know I will after I finish this!

Birthday Luck

I still remember a few years after I got back into collecting classic games (the summer of 1996), I went flea marketing on my birthday. Well, it was heading towards the end of flea market season and I decided to see if my birthday would yield any luck. I had at the time, very few Coleco games, only the twelve I found at a garage sale. They were the usual common, but fun games.

So I head to the flea market and look around. After going through almost the whole thing, I head over to a table and see a Colecovision. Not only a Coleco, but also a bunch of stuff with it. I ask the person how much for the whole thing and they say $35.00. As luck would have it, that is exactly how much I had left! So I bought it and headed home!

As I got home and really looked at the deal, I noticed that there were many games that I had never seen before. I had seen their names on the internet, but never actually seen the cart in person. So for the next few weeks, I was able to enjoy my Coleco system again like I never did before!

The funny thing is that the collection had 28 games with it, but only two were duplicates for me. These were Donkey Kong and Zaxxon. The other 26 were all new for me. Some of the games were Sewer Sam and Squish 'em Sam, which gave me the first experience with

speech on the Coleco. There was a great pinball like game called Flipper Slipper and some not so fun games like Spectron and Frantic Freddy. I enjoyed arcade classics like Tapper and Frenzy again! I even received a steering wheel to play Turbo and Dukes of Hazzard with! But the games I really enjoyed were Choplifter (I never played the game before this), Up n Down, Oil's Well and the game I wanted to play since my youth, Frogger II!

This is probably the best Coleco deal I ever found, not only in value, but in enjoyment. For a few weeks, I got to enjoy games that I had little or no prior knowledge of. I was a kid again and it was fun! Plus, I got to go from 12 different games to 38 different ones and that is a huge jump! I had one of the best birthdays that year and the best present was the one I found for myself!

10 EYEBALL BENDERS

by Alan Hewston

Can you identify these 10 videogame hardware items? Remember Games magazine used to do this? Nothing here is very rare. Some are easy, some are different, some are tough. All are eye-ball-bending. These were delayed as they took up too much memory to put in the hardware themed issue. Check back next issue for 10 more!

Alan Hewston is a "Controls" engineer at the newly re-named NASA John H. Glenn Research Center in Cleveland OH. He loves to take apart all his videogame H/W and controllers and see what makes them tick (or not tick). Alan can be reached at: hewston95@stratos.net

Click here to go to Eyeball Benders!

An American Collector in Europe

by Doug Saxon

He was walking quickly, didn't want anyone to beat him to the stash that this flea market could certainly hold. He glanced left...nothing, glanced right...nothing and moved on from booth to booth. It was so hot, 32°C in fact, that he was sweating and the entire area reeked of BO. He couldn't understand why so many people were wearing pants, some dudes were even wearing suits. This one guy walking next to him smelled just awful and he shielded his nose as he approached a large group of people clogging the way ahead. It drove him crazy, no room to get through, perhaps there was a way back and around? He looked back and there was no way back either, people swarmed in behind him, he was caught in this mass of people, a traffic jam almost at a standstill, crawling through the aisle while sumguy was probably discovering the find of his life, and he could do nothing about it. He could've screamed. But instead he listened to a few people negotiating, or rather arguing over some chess board. What language were they speaking, Italian, German? Who knows. Finally, the jam slowly receded and the way ahead was clear. He went on from booth to booth at a hurried pace when he finally saw it. Some dude with a small collection of carts, 2600 it seemed, and he had never seen anyone of them before in his life. How rare could they be? He dug through the pile and a few titles brushed passed his eyes, Fancy Car, Fighter Pilot, Phantompanzer, Eis-Hockey Fieber, Duck Fighting,

Wüstenschlacht...what ARE these? Is this a dream? He asked the owner how much they cost and after the guy stared at him blankly he realized he didn't speak a word of English. What was he going to do? He started asking people walking by if they spoke English and after a few minutes he was able to find someone and pleaded him, "Uh, could you please ask this dude how much these Atari games cost?" The guy just laughed and obliged. After rambling with the owner in who knows what language, he turned to face him and said 2 Deutsch Marks a piece. He thought that seemed reasonable enough and this whole encounter had already been awkward enough so he wasn't going to bother negotiating. So he grabbed 15 or so strange 2600 carts, said thanks to flea-market-translator-guy, and went on his way.

This is what a typical collector from America might experience at a flea market in Europe.

Besides the language (unless you are in the UK!) and carts, the flea markets themselves are very similar; booths tightly arranged, narrow aisles, and food stands everywhere. But the experience is quite different. I was at a flea market in Belgium, a country where French and Flemish is spoken, both of which I couldn't speak a word of, and I actually did have the nerve to get someone to translate for me! I wanted those carts! However, other times I have found that it is to your advantage to make a sad attempt at speaking the language and just play stupid. Doing this can often get you a very low price as the owners can't bargain with you and unless they really value the games, which is uncommon even in the States, they won't bother and just sell them to you. And strangely, the younger people seem to really appreciate the fact that you are American and may give you really low prices just because of that!

Even though there were tons of pirates, imports, and PAL conversions the carts aren't as easy to find as one would expect. For one, there are no thrift stores or garage sales, so everything is found at flea markets or in newspaper ads. I have yet to find a REAL stash at a flea market, as the biggest collection I have seen so far consisted of only 20 Atari 2600 games. I have not seen a single sign of Intellivision, and only two Colecovision games, but the SMS games are pretty abundant. However, there are frequently advertisements in the papers for Atari games. Unfortunately, from what I have seen, you have to be swift or you will be beaten, and unless you are in the UK or speak the foreign language, you have to go through a pretty humiliating experience calling them. But that doesn't stop us does it? All in all, finding games here isn't as easy as I expected, but the cool thing is almost every game found is a NEW one. And after your collection matures it gets hard to find new games in the wild in the States, which makes collecting here almost a dream.

(Doug Saxon is currently in Europe grabbing all the overseas games. He will be back in the states soon and back to his beloved Atari 5200 and his complete cart collection).

Follow Up to Last Month's Article

by Fred Wagaman

A couple of additional suggestions came from Retrotimes readers concerning last month's Storage Tips and Tricks.

The first came from Phil Satterley (progrocktv@hotmail.com). Phil's suggestion was for storing loose carts, use baseball card storage boxes. These long cardboard boxes are perfect for Intellivision or Atari carts.

The second was from Wayne Sepega (Wayne_Sepega@horc.com). Wayne's method for storing loose carts involves using a 5 drawer dresser. He currently has a dresser that houses his 400+ 2600, 5200, 7800, Coleco, Intellivision, and Fairchild games. He figures, once the original dresser fills up ,he can just get another. One advantage to this storage method is that he's able to get to the games if you need to with out much hassle.

Thanks to both Phil and Wayne.

Do I Need This ?

by Fred Wagaman

Last month we discussed some of the methods of storing the games in your collection. I know we never mentioned the safety deposit box and the Tengen Tetris combination. Sorry about that.

This month we'll discuss a related topic.

Have you ever gotten into a situation where you were looking at a pile of carts at a thrift and wondered if you needed any of them ? Or worse, spent money on a game you thought you needed, only to get home and find out you already have it, and it's in better shape than the one you bought ? Fret no more, I'm here to help.

If you have more than 40 games in your collection, chances are you can't remember them in your head. Once you get above 100 - 200 games, you probably think that a game looks familiar, but you're not sure. And then what about boxes and instructions ? Condition ?

Obviously the simplest method of keeping track is to write your games down on a piece of paper. I know that almost sounds too simple, but if you are going to do it, you want to do it right. Not just haphazardly scribbling on a napkin. If you have a sizable collection, you're not going to want to do this again anytime soon. I'd suggest getting a tablet or paper with three-holes. Put each system on a separate page and write the games in alphabetic order. Set a column for boxes and another for instructions. Set up separate columns for condition, if that is important to you. You may choose to put a rarity value on each game. Leave plenty of open rows for games to be added in the future. That way, you won't be rewriting the entire list after every stop at Goodwill.

Another method is to get a list of available games for the systems you collect. If you have access to the internet (and chance are you aren't reading this if you don't), there are plenty of list resources available to you. Once you've printed out that list, use it to mark off the games you have. Another option is to get a copy of the Digital Press Classic Video Games Collector's Guide (V5.0) (www.digitpress.com) and use it as a checklist for the systems that it covers.

(Just a side note here, if you don't have one of these guides, you're really missing out on a tremendous resource. If you don't have one, get one. As a collector, player or hobbyist, you'll never regret it.)

The problem with either of these methods is that they might not cover the games you collect. I've tried, unsuccessfully, to find complete game lists for Genesis, SNES and Saturn. They will turn up eventually, but keeping track of those games through this method is out of the question right now (Unless I use Funcoland's newspaper).

But really, the best method of keeping track of the games you have is right in front of you. Your computer can be your best friend when it comes to game tracking.

Plenty of pre-packaged data base software exists. Baseball card, comics and Beanie Baby collectors all have simple (and for the Beanie people, it better be), easy to use software for tracking their collections. One of those could be purchased and corrupted for your use. As long as it's flexible enough to allow you to enter your own data. Some of this kind of software present a list of information specific to the other hobby and that's all you have to work with. So be careful.

For the more computer adept among you, there are also plenty of more complicated choices that allow you to create your own list. This method allows you to define your list to your liking.

Most spreadsheet programs (Lotus, Excel, etc.) can handle lists of items. Word processors (Word, Word Perfect, etc.) have table definitions that allow you organize columns and sort rows based on criteria you put in. If you want to go all out, get an actual Data Base program (like Access) and go to it. Once entered, the data can be printed, stored, sorted, summerized, collated, backed-up and transmitted with ease.

For myself, I use a combination of things. First, I keep a list of all my games in an Access database that I set defined. I've included the obvious like box and instructions, but also put in other categories. Things like "Additional Equipment Required", or "Purchase Price". I even included a place that I can put a screen shot or cover scan. Then I print the list sorted by Machine and Game Name (with box and instructions columns) for storage in my Planner book. This way I can take my game list with me. The only problem with this method is that I have to write down my newer acquisitions in the planner as well as enter them into the list. I certainly don't want to print out a new list every week !

I also took the time, using the DP guide, and made a list of the games I don't have. For most older systems, this list is shorter than the games I do have. That list can be taken with me easily when I go places. Another thing I've done is printed a list of the games that I need boxes or instructions for. Lately I've been trying to find missing boxes and instructions for my more modern systems (Nintendo and newer) before they become scarce. This list is an inconspicuous 1 or 2 sheets.

I'm currently looking into downloading my game list into a PDA (Palm III) and seeing how well that would work. If I have success, I'll let you all know. I hope that this gives you some ideas for keeping track of your collection. If you have any additional suggestions or methods that you use, let me know at fcw3@postoffice.ptd.net and I'll share them with the world.

Fred has been playing games for over 20 years and actively collecting them for almost 10. The 2300 + games that he has takes up most of his home office and living room. He lives in Denver, PA with his understanding wife Jennie and his 3 year-old, button-loving son, Max. One additional suggestion he has. If you do keep track of the purchase price of your games, no matter how good of deals you get, never add up home much you spend on games. It will frighten you. And if you do, never, EVER, show it to your wife.

The Big Move

by William Cassidy

Recently, I got a job in Cincinnati, which is about 2 hours' driving time away from my home town of Portsmouth, OH. This means I had to move, and of course I brought my game collection with me. Let me tell you: moving all of your prized classic items can be a harrowing experience! You'll worry about systems getting damaged, cords getting broken, labels being torn... not to mention that moving is generally a pain in the #$*@! no matter what. I thought I would share some of my experiences in case any other collectors find themselves faced with the prospect of moving.

Once you find out you're moving, the first thing you need to do is start saving newspapers. Fill your old home with them--you can't have too many, trust me. Then, concentrate on getting some sturdy cardboard boxes. You can buy these from a moving company like Ryder or U-Haul, but your best bet is to ask around at the local grocery or department store. These places throw out tons of boxes a day, and if you ask, they might give them to you for free! I was lucky enough to have an uncle who works for a hosptial's Receiving Dept., and he gave me all the empty shipping boxes I could ask for!

If you have enough advance notice, you'll want to take the time to go through your collection carefully. If you run across items you're not sure you want to keep, you might want to get rid of them now rather than bother with packing them. Hold a newsgroup or eBay auction(s) to dispose of unwanted stuff and your supply of "trade bait". It makes moving easier and supplies you with extra cash to pay for moving expenses, and you can always rebuild your "trade bait" supply later.

Before you start packing, get some "twisty-ties"--you know, the kind that are used to hold bread wrappers together. Only you will probably want ties that are longer, like the kind used for trash bags. You can roll up your game cords and use the ties to hold them together. Now you're ready to pack. Some things like loose and boxed games are rectangular and are fairly simple to pack. Line your shipping boxes with some newspaper to cushion them, and then start fitting games snugly in place. From time to time, pick up the box to make sure it doesn't get too heavy (remember, you'll have to lug this thing around later!). If it is, fill the remainder of the box with newspaper and tape it shut.

It is very important that you label each box you pack. Write a detailed list of what each box contains on the box itself. This will help you when you're unpacking and need to find a specific item. I forgot to label one box clearly and spent a few hours hunting for a certain RF switchbox I needed. MAKE SURE to put important reminders like "FRAGILE" and "THIS END UP" on boxes that need them.

When packing hardware, be extra careful. Place rolled-up cords horizontally and pack plenty of newspaper around them to make sure they don't bend. Use newspaper to hold joystick handles in place. In short, when in doubt, use more newspaper! It really will protect your easily-damaged equipment.

If you have any extra delicate pieces, such as a Vectrex unit, you may want to make a special trip to transport them, so you won't have to risk them being thrown around with the other less important boxes. Wrap them in clothes or blankets (since you'll probably be

moving these as well), and always make sure you know where they are so they aren't accidentally manhandled by someone who doesn't know any better (including yourself--sometimes you forget what's in all those boxes).

And, as a final reminder: before you move, hopefully you'll have a chance to get to know your future home a little. Find an area in your new home that can accommodate your collection, one that has plenty of grounded power outlets. While unpacking, carry all the relevant boxes to this area, and they'll all be handy when you have time to set up your consoles again.

I hope this article has been of help!

William Cassidy is a classic gaming addict who is still recovering from moving over 500 games and 10 consoles across southwestern Ohio. When not moving, he maintains The Odyssey2 Homepage! at http://www.zoomnet.net/~kcassidy/o2home.html, which will also soon be moving, to http://www.classicgaming.com/o2home/.

MAME Reviews

Pity me for my poor V-Stick has fallen on hard times. My trusty stick has been wounded and has left me to the horror of the keyboard. So I must do these reviews on games from past experiences. So until my V-Stick gets fixed, I must either play games the way I did in the pre-V-Stick days or with the keyboard.

Space Fury

This game is a novelty that quickly wears off and leaves you with a mildly entertaining game. Pity as it could be more, but the programmers seem to put more into their talking alien than in his armada.

The highlight of the game is the talking alien head. His one big eyeball goes back and forth as he taunts you. "So a creature for my amusement, prepare for battle" he spews as his ships come at you. Then as you complete a screen, he taunts you some more. He reminds me of those pesky Frenchmen in "Monty Python and the Holy Grail", except he isn't funny. He will taunt you and taunt you some more. But it works as you want to make mincemeat out of his armada and shut his big trap. At the end of the game, he gives you a ranking from adequete (that is as low as I have ever gotten) to more flattering ones like stimulating and ones that I have yet to achieve.

The game itself isn't so interesting. You start off with a one shot ship. As you progress through the levels, you will come to a docking sequence where you dock your ship and get more powerful ships with lots of shots, in multiple directions. The docking is quite easy and if you take a moment, you should always get it.

The enemy start off as four little pieces that come together to form a bigger ship that is capable of shooting fireballs at you. You can shoot the pieces before they form to halt this. One thing to remember is that when the pieces are small, they cannot harm you if you hit them, but once two pieces get together they can kill your ship. So you need to be weary, once they get together.

The enemy ships are pretty much the same, with little differences. Once you get past a few levels, you run out of docks and the alien shuts up. The game gets pretty boring and it is just a matter of honor then. You want to rack up as high a score as possible, so the alien doesn't insult you.

While the novelty of the game will quickly fade, it will entertain you for awhile. Plus, it is always fun to see just how good a rating you can get.

Pooyan

This is one of those fun little games that didn't get too much exposure on the home front. It was made for the Atari 2600, with a less than desirable version and it made it to a few computers. Then it disappeared altogether from the American consoles. It did appear on the Famicon (for anyone who doesn't know, this is the Japanese version of the Nintendo), but failed to make it to these shores. But now with MAME, you can relive those joyful days of the endless struggle of the little pigs versus the big bad wolf, or in this case, wolves.

The game starts off with a cute little cartoon of the wolf chasing the pigs. While the animation is pretty good, the music in the background is some of the most obnoxious I have ever heard. From there, you are off to stop those pesky wolves from making bacon out of you. You are in a basket that is pulled up and down and your job is to shoot arrows at the wolves who are coming. But it isn't the wolves you want to hit, rather their balloons that are helping them to descend to the ground. Pop their balloons and the wolves fall to their deaths. Don't pop them and the wolves will run across and climb up a ladder and sit there waiting for you to come down. If you do come down, the wolf may snap at you and eat you right up! Not a good thing for a piggy.

The second level throws you for a loop as the wolves are going up instead of down. This time you must stop them from getting up and pushing a boulder on your poor head. Again, this is not good for a piggie's health.

Besides your basic arrows, there is a super arrow! Get this by going up to the top of the rope when it appears. When you shoot it, it will wipe out all the wolves in its path. Sorta a mini smart bomb. This will aid you and you can keep getting them. There is no limit, but they don't always appear, so you may have to wait.

When you boil it down, it is a fun little game. While it isn't a classic, it does offer enough to make you want to play it a few times. I love the little animations and even the awful music at the beginning will grow on you. Plus, how can you not enjoy a game where you have to save cute, little piggies?

Video Game Acronyms

Like everything in the world, video games need acronyms. So I am here to give you a selection of ones to use and offer you the challenge to create some of your own! Some will be funny and others are not, but all is done in good fun. Feel free to use any you wish, F.O.C. (free of charge)! Note that letters that are capital are the ones that count towards the Acroynms.

A.A.A.-Awesome Atari Addict!
B.F.G.-Bally Fan and Gamer
C.C.C.-Classic Cart Collector
B.O.A.R.S.-Buyer Of Atari Related Stuff
C.L.O.C.S.-Collected Legion Of Coleco Supporters
U.F.O.-United Fans of Odyssey
M.O.O.-Master Of Odyssey
A.G.E-Arcade Game Enthusiasts
A.P.E.-Arcade Player

Pacman Fever the Review

Last month I received my copy of Pacman Fever and decided like many people to give my opinion of it. There has been alot of talk about how it was remastered and not the original songs. Well, I for one didn't own the album in my youth and only heard the Pacman Fever song on the radio. I did get a copy of it from a friend, but only heard it twice before my kids accidentaly copied over it. So I am not an expert on it.

Listening to the CD, the first impressions is just how silly it all is. Some of the songs are fairly clever, but most are downright silly. I equate the album to eating rich, chocolate cake, it is all right to indulge once in awhile, but if you have it too often it loses its appeal. This is an album that I can only listen to in doses. As much as I have grown to love Frogger's Lament and "Do the Donkey Kong", they are not something I want to listen to all the time.

One problem with the music is that it is very redundant. Before just about all the songs, you hear the sound effects from the game. While this was pretty cool the first few times, like any trick, it soon grows tiresome. The songs are not as varied as the games they sing about. The lyrics and music are fairly simplistic, which is part of charm, I guess.

The title song is probably the strongest of the bunch. Next on my list of favorites is "Frogger's Lament. I don't know why this song appeals to me, but it does. Must be some primal thing that cannot be explained. "Do the Donkey Kong" would be my next choice, followed by "Ode to a Centipede". Not surprising, these are the first four songs on the album.

The second half of the album is much weaker. "Hyperspace" and "The Defender" aren't very memorable and may make you hit the stop button. But Mousetrap is sorta enjoyable in its own weird, little way. Not a great song, but for some reason I can tolerate this more. "Goin' Berzerk" is filler, plain and simple. It is very similar to one of those sugary love songs of the 50's and 60's, only with a video game theme. It could just as easily been sung by the Archies.

Overall, the album is like many things in our youth, not as good as we remembered them. It isn't a bad album, just a decent album that so happened to be about video games. If you aren't a video game fan, I highly doubt you would want to own this CD. But being a classic game fan, we are more tolerant and it is good fun. Just listen to it in small doses and it will be more enjoyable.

A Deeper Look

I decided to go against the grain and take a deeper look at a pair of new games. They are both remakes of classic arcade games, so it is allright. Why am I justifying anything when I am the editor? Must be the heat. Anyways, here they go!

Hyper Crazy Climber

This import only game was released for the Playstation. I must shamefully admit that I bought the bootleg version of the game, after an exhaustive search for the import. Being a big fan of the classic arcade game, I had to play this game. So I entrusted my money with a bootlegger and waited patiently. It paid off as I got my copy. While I do not support piracy, sometimes a game is not available any other way.

Enough moral nonsense, time to speak about the game. It plays just like the original game with you moving up to the top of a structure. Only this time the structures are different. The first one is a mountain, followed by an undersea building and then a Notre Dame looking building and I don't mean the college, but rather the famous cathedral in France.

One big difference in this game from the original is that if you are holding on with both hands, you cannot be knocked off. This is unlike the original where those accursed barbells would kill you, irregardless of how many hands you were holding on with. This makes things a bit easier and more fair as some of the obstacles would make quick work of you.

One area that has been greatly improved is the number of different creatures and

obstacles on each level that try to halt your progress. There are literally a dozen different things on each level. This makes you want to continue, just to see what is on the next level.

One major difference from this game is the inclusion of power-ups. You can pick up sticks of dynamite and other stuff. The dynamite will shoot one row of flames that do some damage when you pick up one stick. Pick up multiple sticks and you have the makings of a smart bomb, which clears a level faster than cops at an underage party.

All in all, it is a very enjoyable game. It keeps all the important elements of the original arcade game and adds lots of new stuff! While it takes some getting used, with the Playstation controllers, they do respond pretty well. No substitute for my V-Stick, but pretty decent anyways.

Asteroids

If you ever played Asteroids and if you are reading this newsletter, the odds are pretty good you have, then this game will be very familiar to you. It features the same controls as the original game. Actually it has the same as Asteroids Deluxe as it features shields over hyperspace. But the rotate and shoot are the same, only on a Playstation controller. The gameplay is identical as you must shoot the asteroids, which break into smaller ones. There is also the occasional ship that comes and annoys you.

While the gameplay is nearly identical, the graphics and bonuses are not! First off, the backgrounds are much nicer than the black with stars background of the original. You see planets and stuff in the background and it can be a bit overwhelming at first. But once the game get going, you will have no problem keeping your eyes on the enemies. Also, the asteroids are better drawn and rotate. The explosions are also very nice. The sound is also updated and adds to the experience. The enemy ships are also better looking, nothing incredible, but pretty cool.

One area I can do without is the beginning introduction. While they are alright the first time, they soon are nothing more than something to get past as fast as possible. Just one more click of your joystick. I guess someone out there must like these intros as they keep doing them. At least they give you a choice on whether or not to view it.

Like any remake, there will be some people who are happy and others who are not. I am one that is happy with this remake. Sure things could be different and people can nitpick, but it is a very enjoyable game and one that I have played more than I wish to admit to. And isn't that all we can ask of a game?

Pacman, A Case Study

While Pacman may seem like an ordinary arcade game to you, there is alot more to this game than you may realize. If you take a deeper look at the game, you may find that it is complex enough to even keep Freud busy. Read on and see.

First off, we have a power struggle between the Pacman and the ghosts. Why is this? From what we can tell, it is over the dots that pacman tries to clear the maze of. What is the fascination with these objects? Obviously the ghosts cannot have them as they move over them without anything happening. But when Pacman takes them, we have a conflict as they try to prevent it from happening. Are they like a dragon that hoards its treasure, even if it has no real value to them? Or is there a jealousy over Pacman's ability to retrieve them, when they cannot?

One must also ask why Pacman is unwilling to share these with the ghosts? Surely there are enough for everyone, yet he makes a pig of himself and devours them all. Is this a slap at authority as Pacman gloats because he can grab them, while the ghosts are unable to? Or does Pacman have a eating disorder than needs to be dealt with? Maybe those tunnels are a place where he purges the excess dots.

If you look at the foes that Pacman fights, you will see that they are ghosts. Are they really ghosts or are they symbolic of the ghosts of the past he is running from? Everyone has proverbial ghosts to battle, but Pacman's seem to materialize. Is there any significance to

their colors? One must wonder if these are actually phobias that Pacman is trying to overcome and the power pellets are symbolic of substances he uses to try and forget these spirits of the past? One must wonder?

While this case study is short, it does make one ask questions about this game. Sure Pacman is a fun game for the player, but what about for the ones involved, is it a fun game or a psychological struggle? Think about that the next time you play!

Overheard in the Newsgroups

Unlike last month, there were numerous threads going on. They were also more on the lighthearted side than the past thread. So crack a smile and read on!

1. **Favorite Computer**-Someone asked what people's favorite computer was and the winner by a big margin was the Commodore 64! A very distant second was the Atari 8-Bit. There were also votes for the Atari ST, Amiga, TI 994A and the Vic 20.

(As real as a $3.00 Bill).

2. **Bogus Prototypes**-Some guy knowingly or unknowingly (though the general consensus is that he knew) tried to sell a Donkey Kong prototype. But as many of the knowledgeable people in the newsgroup were quick to point out, it was an obvious fake. Is this an isolated incident or the start of a new trend?

3. **Paying for Priority and getting Standard**-Someone asked about what can be done when someone charges you for priority mail and ends up sending it a cheaper rate. While there is little that can be done, other than complain, you can make a note of the seller and try not to do business with them. The problem is that sometimes they send the item and it gets wrecked in the process. I just had an instance of this happening where I was the high bidder on a shrinkwrapped Pole Position for the C64 and ended up getting a boxed, but opened and very worn copy of International Soccer for the C64 and instead of shipped Priority Mail as they advertised, it was shipped with a piece of paper around it for a third the price. So it can be a bit frustrating, but other than demanding a refund or negative feedback, there is little I can do.

eBay Notes

While the prices on some of the classic game systems are going down, the prices on more

recent stuff is not! Super Nintendo game, in particular, are going up! Especially the role playing games are gaining in value. Games like Earthbound, which one sold shrinkwrapped for as low as $10.00 (of course Best Buy was blowing them out for $5.00 a pop) is now fetching as high as $45.00! The biggest of the Super Nes games was the Crazy Climber import. This one would pop up on occasion on eBay and sell for about $100.00. This seemed to be the rule, but a month ago, one copy went for an unheard of $400.00+! I was floored, especially since I had a copy of it, but sold/traded it to get the money for my V-Stick. Other Super Nes games that get big money include Mr. Do, which has brought in as much as $150.00, Chronotrigger which pulls in $50-$60 on a regular basis and Zelda which fetches around $40.00.

Another system that is bringing in more money is the Nintendo. While the very common games are still bringing in next to nothing, there has been more demand for the classics like Final Fantasy, Metal Gear and the later Dragon Warriors. All of these have seem gains in prices. Also some of the Tengen stuff has seen a rise after consistent declines. Road Runner, Pacmania and Ms Pacman are bringing in more money than in prior months. The Nintendo is starting to pick up a little steam as a collectible game system.

Wall Street Journal Article

As many of you heard, there was an article in the Wall Street Journal about collecting classic video games, both the arcade and the home ones. While it was a long article and like one would expect from the Wall Street Journal, it dealt more with the financial value of the games as opposed to the joy derived from playing them. Here is a small excerpt from the article, dealing with the values of the games. If you are a longtime collector, this is nothing new to you. But if you are new to the hobby, take this with a grain of salt. Classic games like any other hobby has some ridiculously priced items, but the majority of the stuff is very affordable.

Beyond Super Mario Brothers Prices for vintage arcade machines and obscure home-system cartridges are soaring. Here's a look at prices for 10 of the rarest or most popular.*

ARCADE MACHINES

Game/Expect to pay/Comments

Ms. Pac Man (1981) $600-$3,250 The sibling of the original arcade star is now a bestseller for dealers. Cocktail-table sized versions of the vividly colored game are particularly valuable.

Pac Man (1980) $500-$1,200 Even in 1999, Pac-Man can bring video arcade owners up to $100 a week in quarters.

Defender (1980) $500-$900 This save-the-world-from-aliens classic has a particularly strong fan base. Cocktail-table machines are rare.

Galaga (1981) $450-$1,100 This game is actually the sequel to 1979's popular Galaxian; was one of the first games with a "bonus" stage.

Centipede (1981) $300-650 One of the first games to feature a trackball instead of a joystick. Centipede was particularly popular with women.

Asteroids (1979) $300-800 Collectors cite this game's difficulty as one of its virtues; was also hugely popular as an Atari cartridge.

GAME CARTRIDGES

Game/Expect to pay/Comments

Chase the Chuckwagon (1983)Atari 2600 cartridge $125-$200 Rare game was a mail order give-away by dog-food giant Ralston Purina to promote "Puppy Chow."

Tutankham (1983) Intellivision cartridge $80-$200 Very rare, it was sold only in Europe and

Canada by Parker Brothers.

Quadrun (1983)Atari 2600 cartridge $100-$250 Was first available only to "Atari Club" members; one of the first Atari 2600 titles to talk.

MagiCard (1983) For the Atari 2600 system $100-$1,200 This Atari accessory allowed would-be programmers to create their own video games.

*Prices according to Joystix Amusements, Houston, Tex.; Two-Bit Score Inc., Austin, Tex.; Gameroom Warehouse of Lebanon, Pa.; Super Auctions, Fullerton, Calif. and Digital Press Collector's Guide, Edition 5.

(This was taken from the Wallstreet Journal, July 9th 1999. It is owned by the Wall Street Journal and the writer).

A Very Detailed Look At Space Taxi - for the C64

by Alan Hewston

Space Taxi, a 1984 release by Muse Software is one of my all-time favorite games for any platform. When I got back into classic gaming last year, I had hoped to find that this game was ported onto one of the more advanced systems of that time, such as Colecovision, the Atari 5200, or 7800, or even the NES. Unfortunately, this was not the case, and if not for emulation, and for those of us with C64 disks, this game may have been lost, if not forgotten. I definitely recommend that you try to find this game on diskette, or on emulation. With 25 levels, it would be unreasonable, if not unprofitable to have been released on a cartridge format. Regardless, it was very well written by John F. Kutcher, and made for 1 to 4 players - not simultaneously.

Gameplay: You are the cabby for "Space Taxi", a smart looking supercharged space taxi. Your cab has thrusters in the front, back, top and bottom -enough to move you anywhere around the 2-D screen. The fire button toggles your landing gear up/down, and if down, your taxi cannot maneuver left or right. To fight the effects of gravity, a good joystick is definitely a must. Speaking of gravity, this game has exceptionally realistic dynamics, and gravitational effects. Definitely a big reason that I got into this game in college, but I digress - and after all, I am a space cadet.

Your objective is to earn as much money as possible by picking up and delivering customers from one landing pad to another. You collect fares, and tips, and try not run out of gas, or crash your cab. If you hit anything other than a landing pad, you are destroyed. Your customers actually call to you "Hey Taxi!" When you pick up a passenger, he requests "Pad One please", or whatever pad number is his destination, and will repeat this if you go to the wrong pad. He'll yell "Hey" if you run him over. He waves and taps his foot while waiting for you to show up. When you land, he walks over to your cab and gets in. The closer you land to him, the quicker this process, which is important, since the fare you earn decreases in time. You can watch the on-screen meter run down towards $0.00. So you have to be quick to collect a big fare. On the other hand, the more you thrust your taxi around, the sooner your gas supply runs dry. Good thing you get a full tank when you start each level, and when you get a new taxi.

Subsequent customers almost always show up at a different pad, but, to keep you honest, one may appear on the pad where you just landed. Landing is the most important part of scoring well in this game, especially when most of the time your fare has already dropped to $0 by the time you land. Landing will earn you a $0, $5, $10, $15, (and I think $20) tip. The softer the landing, the bigger the tip. Give him a hard splat and he'll give you nothing. Hit really hard and the taxi will crash - a really neat slow motion fall as the sprite garbles or splits up into many pieces of debris that goes all the way to the bottom of the screen. Have no fear, as you're gonna crash eventually, and then be given one of your 5 spare taxis. On the longer levels, you'll eventually hear the low fuel warning, and can watch the gas dry up on your fuel gage. No problem, just land on a pad with a gas tank on it, and fill up - how cool! But 'tis not free. As you fill up, your earnings pay the bill.

Finally, after you deliver all the customers on a level, the barrier at the top of the screen disappears, and your customer requests "Up Please". This is your cue to exit the level and move on. You now get a 15 second break while the next level loads on disk. Then the animated taxi bounces through streaking stars and the name of the next.

Now, what shift do you wish to play.

The Morning shift is levels 1 through 8 in order; Beginner.

The Day shift is levels 9 through 16 in order; Intermediate.

The Night shift is levels 17 through 24 in order; Expert.

The Standard 24 hours shift is levels 1 through 24, and

The Random 24 hour shift levels 1 through 24, in mixed order.

The random shift gives you an excellent chance to see and practice the harder levels. The game provides a demo mode, a pause and quit feature, all of which were very useful back in that day. Finally, most if not all of the moving hazards in this game will destroy you, but not while you are on a pad. Still reading? Good, now for the wonderful creativity that was programmed into each level.

1 Short and Sweet - pick up one customer and exit.

2 The Beach - A few landing pads on an umbrella, a cloud and lawn chair.

3 Skyscraper - Several landing pads, one on top of each skyscraper.

4 Taxi Trainer - Many landing pads and tight quarters pretty much guarantee buying some gas.

5 Beanstalk - A beanstalk has only one leaf to land on, but two at a time all the other leaves come out and you must fly up and over the top of the stalk the get to the other side. I've been lucky enough to complete this level before all the leaves made it out.

6 Taxi Pong - You must land on a gigantic ping-pong table, but a ping pong ball is moving back and forth on a fixed (dodgeable) path.

7 Teleports - The landing pads are set up in sealed rooms and you must teleport from one room to the next.

8 Puzzler - a grid of 6 rooms each with a set of double doors between each adjoining room. One or two buttons inside each room will toggle certain doors open/closed. It is a real puzzle to get the right combinations of moves to go from room to room.

9 Crossfire - Cannons are firing shots at you from below. Sort of like anti-aircraft fire as you go from one side of the screen to the other.

10 Shooting Stars - "My God, the Sky is full of stars", and they are falling down on you.

11 Magnets - Three magnets are constantly pulling you upwards from the top of the

screen. After all, your Taxi is a big chunk of metal.

12 Black Hole - Awesome. The black hole in the middle of the screen is pulling you in. You must constantly fight its gravitational pull.

13 Turbo-Charged Taxi - Space Taxi thrusts about 3 times more powerfully than normal. You'll burn up a lot of fuel as you find out what "bang-bang" control means.

14 Space Mines - Someone forgot to clean up after that last war, and these babies are ready to nail you. There are 7 sets of different colored blocks with 2 or 3 blocks each. You can only fly between blocks of differing colors or . . .

15 Electroids - Only one pad, but 4 sets of Electroids move (like

corkscrews) from right to left on the screen. You know they are spinning (moving), since an opening is moving along with them. Go through each of the openings to get the customer, and return.

16 Blizzard - The snow is coming down, and these gigantic flakes will destroy you - even on a pad.

17 Interference - A handful of satellite dishes send out false control signals to you taxi, but only when you are close to them. You must overcome both gravity and their interference signals. A good strategy is to get locked in and put the landing gear down when far away and go straight down.

18 Taxi Maze - Now you must circumnavigate the entire amazing screen, just to get one customer.

19 The Switch - How Cruel. Somebody just rewired your Taxi's joystick. You better figure out which direction is up fast. Gotta be the most creative thing I've ever seen in a game. "The switch" is always done the same, so you only have to learn it once.

20 Fast Break - Now the doorways are breakable -sort of. You have to ram into these barriers at full-speed, and wham! - suddenly, you made it to the other side, and are now at a dead stop. If you do not ram them fast enough and you'll rebound backwards. Really awkward.

21 Rebound - Speaking of rebounds. Someone turned loose a slew of yellow tennis or basketballs that constantly collide with Space Taxi. This sends you on the rebound and often into a wall or other obstacle.

22 Shift O Rama - Pretty much like crossing the road in Frogger -there are 6 or so rows each going in opposite directions. 3 pads on the top and 4 on the bottom make this an extremely tedious level.

23 & 24 Lasers and On the Move. I have yet to make it far enough to know which

is 23 and which is 24.

Lasers - Lasers are firing on and off and you wait and then thrust by them quickly.

On the Move - Uh oh, I forget this one. I think that there are 3 platforms (vertical layers) of landing pads that are constantly on the move, all the way left, then all the way right. They take up almost the entire screen, and you cannot sit on a pad for very long. There is just enough room to slip between layers before each gap closes.

25 Mystery - If you complete all 24 hours in the day, you get to the bonus level.

Additional game options are to view the instruction page, or high score page. A really polished off piece of programming, I must say. I read one magazine back in the day that gave this A+ quality game a C- rating. Phooey on them. All this creativity and no sequel. Not even a PlayStation upgrade.

Alan Hewston, Retro Times regular is back. Finally reached the magic #300 Atari 2600 cart. (mid 260's excluding SEARS etc.). Been finding a lot of Atari 400 / 800 / XEGS carts lately. Looking to trade with anyone in NE Ohio. [hewston95@stratos.net]

Conclusion

While this issue was quickly put together, I feel it was an enjoyable one. I had plotted out many of the articles and it was just taking the time to commit them to paper (or virtual paper) to get it going. Hopefully next month I can give you a report from the Classic Gaming Show in Las Vegas. If you are going, look for me and say hello! I am always willing to talk video games and maybe we can sit down for a quick game. See you in a month and lets keep those submissions coming!

Tom Zjaba

(None of the pictures were taken from the Digital Press CD, but still a darn good deal! To get your own copy, go to http://www.xnet.com/~skelly/ or http://digitpress.com and order one. If you haven't ordered one yet, you are going to miss it and will only have yourself to blame).

Retrogaming Times logo was designed by Patrick O'Neill.