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01 Introduction
02 The Gem Awards
03 New MAME Games
04 MAME Reviews
05 Coin-Op Corner
06 Classic Video Game Quiz
07 When Controllers Go Bad
08 Atari 5200: I HATE THESE DAMN JOYSTICKS!!
09 Questions to a Game Programmer
10 God Bless the Commodore 64
11 Video Game Collector/Player Species
12 G.O.T.C.H.A.
13 My Favorite Joystick
14 eBay Notes
15 What's Happening in the Hobby?
16 Not What We Thought
17 New Atari Roms Available!
18 How To Get Free Games!
19 The Valley of the Centipede - Chapter 2
20 Conclusion
21 Answers

(Special Note: Alan Hewston did a great article on controllers for the Atari 2600 and Colecovision, but since it had tables, it made the load time too great. But fear not as you can still read it by ***CLICKING HERE!****)*

Introduction

One issue away from #20, just one little issue. If you cannot tell, I am a bit excited about this milestone, almost as excited as I will be about issue #25 (the start of the third year of Retrogaming Times). I am still amazed at the progress the newsletter has made in the short period of time. Enough about issue #20, lets talk about this issue. Once again we are graced with some new contributors. Lee Seitz gives us a little trivia test (which I personally didn't do too well with) and Geoff Voigt comes onboard as our resident Commodore 64 guy. We hope this will become a regular column. Alan gives us an interview with an Atari programmer from the arcade division. Plus we have another themed issue, this time dealing with the hardware. Plus there is the regular columns from the talented Fred Wagaman and Doug Saxon (which may be his last, so everyone send him a thanks). Oh yeah, some guy named Tom will do a few articles to round things out.

For everyone who missed it last month, we are doing the chat again. It will be the same as last month, **Saturday, March 20th at 8:00 PM EST**. You can access the page from this here web site along with Digital Press, Classic Video Game Nexus, Spike's Big Vectrex Page and others. Please stop by and give us your feedback, we want to hear from you.

The GEM Awards!

Welcome to the first annual GEM Awards (GEM stands for Gaming Excellence Merit, for lack of anything more clever). This is to get nominees for the following categories, all of which deal with classic games. I put down the ones I can think of and I am asking you the readers to send in more nominations. I will then post them next month and you can all vote on who the winners should be. I will then tally the votes and put up the winners! So without further adieu, here are the criteria:

1. This is for last year and since this is the first award, I will allow for the fourth quarter of 1997.
2. Classic games or classic related games only. Doom is not a classic game.
3. Please only vote for one from each category. But you can submit as many nominees as

you wish.
4. In the event of a tie, I will make the decision.
5. Awards will be given for the top place and the runner up. The top spot will get a diamond and the runner up with get a ruby.
6. This is strictly for fun! So lets get those nominations in!

Best New Classic Game
1. Alfred's Challenge for the Atari 2600
2. Amok for the Odyssey II by John Dondazilla
3. Frogger for the Vectrex by ???
4. Spike Hoppin for the Vectrex by John Dondazilla
5. Star Castle for the Colecovision by John Dondazilla

Best Commercial Remake of a Classic Game
1. Frogger by ??? (game was so bad I wanted to forget it)
2. Battlezone by Activision
3. Centipede by Hasbro
4. Asteroids by Hasbro
5. Pitfall 3D by ????

Best Mention of a classic game in a television show or movie
1. Frogger on Seinfeld
2. Colecovision on South Park
3. Coleco Adam on the Simpsons

Best Compilation Disks for Classic Games
1. Intellivision Lives by the Blue Sky Rangers for PC.
2. Scott Adams CD by Frank Traut for PC and TI 99/4A
3. Williams Arcade Classics 2 for PC and Playstation
4. Atari Arcade Classics 2 for PC and Playstation
5. Activision Compilation for the Playstation
6. Microsoft Revenge of the Arcade for the PC

New MAME Games!

After tons of games I never heard of have been added to MAME, they finally added a bunch from my wish list! Now the greatest emulator ever, is even better! Here is a list of the new games that will keep me occupied in the coming months!

Star Hawk -Was only a Vectrex version, but now you can enjoy it on the MAME!
Star Castle -One of the best reasons to own a Vectrex and a darn good game!
Rip Off-One of the best two player games out there! Alan, get ready for some serious Rip Off battles!
Warrior-A game that is rarely seen, until now!
Armor Attack-Another great two player game! Send your little bitty jeep against tanks and helicopters!
Solar Quest-Also a good two player game and one that proves that getting too close to the sun is dangerous!
Boxing Bugs-A game I only heard of, but never played. This will be fun to explore!
Space War-It is the first arcade game and that is reason enough!
Joust 2-Previously only available on the Williams Arcade Classics 2. Another good two player game!
Boulder Dash-We all played the computer version, but now we can try the arcade version!
Chiller-One of the first gory gun games. While it may seem pretty tame now, it was pretty controversial back then (especially the Nintendo version).
Crossbow-Another arcade classic comes home! All we need is to figure out how to hook a light gun up the the computer and we will be set!

Why is it?

Why is it that the lowly TI 99/4A's version of Donkey Kong has all four screens but the later released Nintendo and Atari 7800 don't?

MAME Reviews

Tune in next month to see what I thought of some of the games listed above, but I did not get the newest version of MAME set up in time for publication. But I do have two Jim Dandy of games to review! While hanging down in the bottom half of the alphabet (playing games like Zookeeper, Tapper and Robotron), I decided to put some time in with two games and thus the reviews. So get ready for some more MAME reviews from the only person who is still praying for Munchmobile to be ported to MAME.

Turtles

That is right, the cute little game for the Odyssey II was an arcade game first. Well, I never paid much attention to the game, played it once and wasn't much impressed. Well, I decided to give the game another whirl and found that first impressions were unjust. This is a fun little game!

Your job is guide Momma Turtle around the maze and save your baby turtles. There are houses with question marks, scattered around the maze and you have to go in and open them. Most of the time, a cute baby turtle comes out and you have to take him to another house that appears. But two of the houses per level contain bad guys that will zap the poor momma. This is bad. But you do have a weapon! This turtle is no pushover, no siree! She is packing heat in the form of bombs. She can drop one of these bombs and when a baddie hits it, he is stunned for a few moments. You ask why it doesn't kill him? She is a mother turtle and all around nice creature. She doesn't want to bring harm to no one, just save her babies. Nice to see a nonviolent game.

Of course you have a limited number of bombs, but there is a place in the middle of the screen, where you can get more. Each time you run over this area, you get three more bombs. So like the pepper in Burgertime, you can stockpile it. A good strategy on earlier levels is to build up a surplus. There is one small thing to remember about the bombs and this is important. Once you drop a bomb, you cannot drop another until it is detonated. Quite simply, if you drop a bomb, it has to be run over, which will set it off, before you can drop another. So use some strategy in where you lay them bombs as it can be the difference of life and death.

Overall, it is a fun little game. While it is a maze game, it does have enough to set it apart from the Pacman clones. While the game won't keep you up late at night, it is a nice diversion and you may find yourself playing it more than you care to admit.

Tutankham

"Born in Arizona, moved to Babylona, King Tut". Remember those less than immortal words from funny man, Steve Martin (back when he was funny)? Well, this game has nothing to do with that. But I thought it would be fun to start with that anyway. I guess the point I am trying to make is much like the old, stand up Steve Martin, Tutankham the game

is pretty much forgotten. A piece of the past, mostly forgotten. But where Steve Martin went from singing about King Tut to becoming a huge movie star and starring in a bunch of dreck films, Tutankham's only claim to fame is that it is a very rare game for the Intellivision and highly sought after.

Why this fun little game is forgotten is beyond me. I was the champ at this game at my local arcade (considering no one played it, made it that much easier). I always found the game quite enjoyable, but I was in the minority.
But enough about my memories, let us look at the game.

Tutankham is the story of an archeologist who goes into the Egyptian tombs in search of treasure. While there is treasure to find, there is also a ton of guardians who want to have you join them in the eternal slumber. There are crows, snakes, dragons and these strange creatures that look alot like flying peanuts. While this may sound funny, these little buggers are quick and very tough! They will waste you faster than you can say "peanut butter". Your goal is to make your way through the maze and grab treasure and the keys you need to move onto the next tomb.

There is one minor problem that keeps you from easily defeating this game. You can only shoot to the left and right. So if a creature come from the top or bottom, it is too bad. So you need a little strategy to make sure you are not sitting out in the open. But you do get one bomb per guy that works like a smart bomb in Defender and clears all the creatures off the screen. Nice way to make a clear path to the exit!

The game has a fair share of bad guys and lots of different treasures, including special ones at the end of each level. The music is very effective and the action is continuous. I cannot see why this game was so ignored as it is a very enjoyable little game. Give it a whirl and see if you agree. Who knows, it may make you break out one of Steve Martin's old albums and listen to him sing "King Tut". Then again, it may not.

Coin-Op Corner

by Rayth Orlea

Getting that picture to look just right

One of the first things people want to do after getting an arcade machine is to make it look just right. If you are like most, you will want it to look as near mint as possible.

One of the biggest improvements can be made by adjusting the monitor and putting in a cap kit. This time we will stick with a raster monitor, not a vector. Vector monitors are the type found on games like Asteroids.

The first step will be doing a cap kit. Most place on the web that sell cap kits have better direction on there site than I can give you in this space. They are not hard to install but if you feel you can`t do it you may want to try and just adjusting it first.

After years of sitting in an arcade or back room things tend to get out of whack. on the back of most monitors are adjustments for black level, focus, contrast, vert. and horz. size and position, Red, blue, and green gain and cut-off.

BE CAREFUL, THERE IS HIGH VOLTAGE EVEN WITH THE MONITOR UNPLUGGED!

The wire leading into the side of the tube is the main spot of concern over high voltage. Stay away from it for now and only adjust the knobs and things will be ok.

The first thing you want to locate is the blue, red, green cut-off and gains. They are marked on the neck board of the monitor. One smart thing is to mark the staring position of all knobs so you can change it back if needed.

Start by looking at something on the screen that is one of the three colors. What you need to do is to turn up the cut-off almost all the way. then turn the gain up or down until it is the right brightness. now turn the cut off down until it is not "bleeding" past the area that is supposed to be colored. Do this with all three colors. You may have to go back and re-

adjust after getting the last one done. Now find the brightness on the main board near the back. turn it up until the game looks the right brightness to you.

By now the picture is probably getting fuzzy. turn the focus on the fly-back until it sharpens up. The flyback is the black thing with the high voltage wire coming out of it.

Next step is to get the size of the picture right. turn the size up or down until it just fill the space of view of the screen. do this for both horizontal and vertical.

Now you should be looking good. Remember to only do one step at a time so you can undo it if you make a mistake. After a little practice it will become "old hat" to you. Like always if you have any questions or comments feel free to email me. I`ll do my best to help you out.
(Rayth Orlea is 31 and lives in Danville Il, where he drive a bus for mentally handicapped people. He have several reptiles, and also collect arcade machines. He would like to get into some part of the game industry. You can email him at Repti3@aol.com or visit his web site at http://www.geocities.com/timessquare/labyrinth/6694)

Classic Video Game Quiz

by Lee Seitz

This quiz was originally written for and posted on the classic video games mailing list. John Matthews had posted a couple of his own quizzes and wanted one he could take, so I obliged. It occurred to me (finally) that the readers of Retro Times might like it. It's not very hard, but hopefully you'll miss a few. This quiz is geared to Atari's video game systems, with a few other tidbits thrown in for good measure and/or bonus points. No prototypes are involved.

Take this quiz on your own without looking up the answers on the web or in your own collection. (I admit I had to look most of this information up.) Then score yourself according to the key at the end of the answers. Apologies to John for stealing some of his quiz section headers. Let me know if you'd like to see more quizzes.

Atari Trivia

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1. Revisions D and E of the Atari catalog (copyright 1981 (45 games) and 1982 (49 games), respectively) were divided into eight sections. Name them. (These were the red catalogs with "Atari" in a blue diamond with a blue and green border.) (3 points each)

2. Activision's first two Intellivision games were ports of what 2600 games? (3 points each)

3. Name the aliens you're fighting in the 2600 version of Star Raiders (according to the game manual). (3 points)

BONUS: Name the aliens you're fighting in the original (Atari 8-bit) version of Star Raiders. (2 bonus points; no bonus for using the same answer from #3 (i.e. knowing your answer is one or the other))

4. Name all the 2600 games that allow more than two players to play simultaneously. (3 points each; six known answers)

5. Name all the 2600 games that allow more than two players, but not more than two players simultaneously. (2 points each; eight known answers)

6. The Atari Video Computer System was model number CX-2600. Thus the name Atari 2600. What was the model number of the original Atari Pong (for homes)? (3 points)

7. Many games appears for both the 2600 & 5200 or 2600 & 7800, but how many can you name that appeared for all three? Again, remember this does *not* include prototypes. (3 points; six known answers)

Covert Relationships

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1. What do Berzerk, Defender, Galaxian, Phoenix, and Star Raiders have in common? (2 points)

2. What unusual feature (for 2600 games) do Star Trek: Strategic Operations Simulator and Space Shuttle have in common? (3 points)

Club Corner

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1. Atari Age was the magazine of the Atari Club, but what newsletters did Activision and Imagic offer? (2 points each)

BONUS: What were the Colecovision magazine and Odyssey^2 newsletter (published by the Coleco and Magnavox, respectively) called? (2 bonus points each)

2. What do Gravitar, Quadrun, and Battlezone have in common? (3 points)

(Lee Seitz runs the Classic Video Game Nexus, the first stop for many classic gamers and a site they come back to time and time again. You can access the Nexus at http://home.hiwaay.net/~lkseitz/. Lee can be reached at lkseitz@hiwaay.net).

When Controllers Go Bad

by Fred Wagaman

Tonight. Live on Fox. When Controllers Go Bad.

And now your host; Fred Wagaman.

Welcome everyone to Fox's "When Controllers Go Bad". Before we get started, let's send out some get well wishes to James Brown, who found out last week what it was really like "When Animals Attack". You all will be seeing that footage on next week's "World's Funniest Videos".

And now on with the show.

Controllers. The best game in the world is useless without them. They come in all sizes and designs; some good and some bad. Let's look at some of the successes and failures of the classic gaming era.

Let’s start with an all time favorite. The standard Atari 2600 Joystick. Simple design. Single Button, 8-direction stick. Nothing fancy, but it got the job done. An all-time classic. But let’s admit that it had some failings. The rubber grip would come off and expose that sharp plastic shaft. After excessive pressure, the plastic ring inside would break rendering it useless. It required a two-handed grip, even on the "stick-only" games. But it’s still one of our favorites. It set the standard for what could be called a good stick. And there were plenty of other sticks choices. Wico made several "arcade-quality" sticks that were very good. Thrustmaster made a flight-stick-like unit that had a tendency to snap when too much pressure was applied. Suncom made a nice little ball-topped stick. The nicest "little" stick was made by Amiga called the Power Stick. It would fit in the palm of your hand and was only about 3 inches high. The stick moved with ease and it had fire buttons on both sides of the stick.

Not all sticks in the Atari 2600-compatible world were up to the minimum standards that the Atari joystick offered. "Le Stick" comes to mind. A base-less joystick that used mercury switches to determine which direction you were going. Sort of looked like one of the signal buttons from Jeopardy. Biggest drawback was that if you didn't keep the stick perfectly upright, you would move in a direction that just maybe, you didn't intend to. Plus, it had a switch built in to it that shut it down it as an input device if you squeezed it too hard. Then there was the Rolan Joyball. From a distance, it looked like a yellow trackball in a blue base. Upon closer inspection, it was a ball-shaped joystick that you placed you hand on and moved like any other joystick. It was never very comfortable to use. Another sub-standard controller for the Atari world was the Joyboard by Amiga. Too weak to actually stand on. And even if you could, there was no way to keep your balance and actually control the on-screen action. A magazine of that era mentioned how great this thing was going to be to play Decathlon with. They must have never tried.

(Speaking of Decathlon, was there ever another game that destroyed controllers with the speed and fury of this game? Though the latest contender for that title would be "Mario Party" for the N64.)

Other notable Atari-compatible controllers. The Standard Paddle controllers were great… until they became worn. Nothing is more frustrating that a set of paddles that jump. Atari's own "Track and Field" controllers were just what that game needed to make it a success. They were also well-built, made to take the stresses that a game like that puts on a controller. Late in the Atari's life, a trackball was marketed. It was well built, but never really added to much to the games. Only a few games recognized it as a trackball; most used it's instead used it's joystick setting. Too bad.

We'll be right back after these words from our sponsors….

Welcome back. Was there ever a game system from the classic era that had a worse reputation when it comes to joysticks than the Atari 5200 ? Looking back, they were revolutionary, even ahead of their time with the analog input. Many of the modern systems have finally begun to use this. It had 4 fire buttons a 12 button numeric keypad and 3 additional buttons (START, RESET and PAUSE). But Atari's implementation of the analog stick in the early 80's left much to be desired. And their button technology, while fundamentally sound, failed miserably. I'm sure you've heard the stories about brand new sticks not working right out of the box. About how many sticks one goes through trying to find one that works. Well folks, it's all true. Of the dozens of controllers that this host has purchased with systems over the years, I've got 2 that work. And I've never had success in repairing them (Others may have; something to do with the stuff you use to repair rear window defrosters). That's one of the reasons that my Atari 5200 sits in a box and isn't permanently hooked up. But even so, there are several bright spots on the 5200's controller history. The Masterplay Interface allows Atari 2600-compatible joysticks to be used. This rare item often commands a premium price. Then there was the Wico Joystick with Y-cord. This was a well built analog stick that used the y-cord to plug in a standard 5200 controller and use it's number pad. It's another rare item. Last but not least was Atari's own trackball unit for the 5200. Heavy, sturdy and built to last. It's unfortunate that this controller could only be used with a few games.

Another machine who's controller's had good intentions, but bad implementations, was the Intellivision. A 16 direction pad, four fire buttons and 12 button numeric keypad were far and away better than Intellivision's rivals; at least on paper. The rectangular controller was hard to hold.

The buttons were hard to push. But the pad was an excellent concept. So much so, that Nintendo turned it 90 degrees, made it a "+" instead of a "o", put the buttons on the front instead of the side and came up with today's mainstream controller design. So close yet so far. There were never any replacement controllers for the Intellivision because the original unit had them hard-wired to the system. The Intellivision 2 changed that, but no company decided to manufacture replacements. The only enhancement for Intellivision controllers was a little joystick that you could attach to the pad.

We'll be right back…

It would be remiss if we didn't mention the king of the classic era, at least controller-wise, the Colecovision. This unit had more good add-on controllers than any other system of that era. The standard Coleco controller was OK. A joystick, (well more like a joy-nub) 12 button numeric pad and 2 fire buttons on the side. Even though it was the same general shape as the Intellivision's controller, the layout made it much easier to use. The Coleco also offered a well-supported Driving Module. Playing "Turbo" on any other system of the time pales in comparison to this setup. Coleco's trackball was pretty good, not quite as sturdy at the 5200's, but good none the less. The controller that really makes the Coleco the king was it's Super Action Controller. Looking like the hilt of a pirate's sword, this thing ran rings around any other controller. It had four buttons that were accessed by the hand

that would hold the controller, a joystick on top, a wheel and a 12 button numeric pad. Not only would this thing work with the Super Action games, but it would work with ALL of the other joystick-based Coleco games. As a matter of fact, this controller works as an Atari 2600-compatible joystick as well. This controller is a must have.

This concludes our show. We hope that looking back on some of the positives and negatives of the controllers of the classic era, we can gain an understanding of why controllers go bad. Next time, we'll look at the bad controllers of the modern era, like the Power Glove, Uforce and the "Glove". Until then, I'm Fred Wagaman.

(Fred has been playing games for over 20 years and actively collecting them for almost 10. The 2200 + 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. He been know to tell the tale of a woman the required carpal tunnel surgery on both hands from too much Atari. Parents are strongly cautioned to limit their children's playtime. Fred can be reached at fcw3@mail.ptd.net).

Atari 5200: I HATE THESE DAMN JOYSTICKS!!

by Doug Saxon

If you hear yourself constantly yelling the above and perhaps even throwing the joysticks across the room, it probably indicates you have only the standard Atari 5200 joysticks. Yes, perhaps the most hated joysticks of all-time. Not only do they not self-center, but they break and malfunction way too easily. Unfortunately, these infamous joysticks overshadow one of the best and most quality software libraries of any classic system. Although it may seem there is no way around them, there is!

The Wico Command Control Stick is probably the most common replacement to the standard joystick. Not only is it self-centering, but It is very sturdy and customizable. Perhaps the most useful characteristic is the X and Y adjustment switches which allow you to adjust the self-centering position.

The Competition Pro Stick is another great stick. It is very sturdy and comes with its own non-detachable Y-adapter. It has a more "digital" feel than the Wico or the standard sticks. But if digital is what you are looking for, it would be best to go for the next stick.

The Masterplay Interface is the device that is almost every Atari 5200 owner's dream (speaking from experience here). This device allows you to use any, I repeat any, 2600 compatible joystick with your 5200. It was mentioned earlier that the Atari 5200 sticks are analog. Games like Pac-Man and Wizard of Wor require precise movement and the analog sticks can ruin the game. However, with the digital 2600 sticks this problem is solved.

There you have the three most common replacements to the standard 5200 joysticks.

Errr....I mean not so common replacements. The problem here is that each of these sticks are pretty hard to find, the Masterplay Interface being the most elusive (figures as it is the most useful, right?). If you are having problems with the standard joysticks, I highly recommend investing in a Wico or Competition Pro, or even a Masterplay Interface if you have the dough (or the luck in finding one in the wild!). I recently acquired all three joysticks in a trade and I can only say how pleased I am!

Before you decide to get rid of your Atari 5200 collection though, consider picking up one of these sticks and I think you will reconsider ridding yourself of all those great games!

(Doug Saxon is leaving Retrogaming Times for the time being as he travels abroad. So send your overseas game want lists and items you have to trade to Doug at saxondj@email.uc.edu. Oh yeah, and encourage him to find a computer over there to keep sending us articles).

Questions to a Game Programmer

by Alan Hewston

In a bit of a twist this month, instead of an interview with a programmer we have an interview with an Atari corporation hardware designer. Brian McKee was a high school friend of mine and using the Internet, I tracked him down. When I found out that he had once worked for Atari, I was very excited, and asked him to do this interview for Retro Times.

Question - Which Atari corporation did you work for?

Atari Games Corporation. The coin-op people. The company that started the video game revolution of 1972 by shipping "PONG." As many of you know, in 1984 Atari split in two for financial reasons. I'm sure the quote "you lost how much money?!!" still bounces around the Warner offices today. The first division, Atari Games (those revolutionary guys) changed hands a few times, and ultimately became a subsidiary of Midway Games Inc a couple of years ago. The other division, Atari Corp (Atari 800, VCS, 5200, 7800, ST, Jaguar, etc.) all but died a few years ago.

Question - What hardware did you work on and for which games?

The Atari hardware I put together, COJAG (stands for Coin-Op Jaguar) shipped in two games: "Area 51" and "Maximum Force". In "Area 51", I designed the gun interface (accurate within a 2 pixel by 2 pixel square) with Ed Logg. He told me ways to make the gun more accurate and I figured out ways to do it in hardware. The hard drive was the key to the game play's movie capability. We had originally thought to put a CD ROM on the system, but after the coin op 3do hardware had CD problems, and the price of hard drives started falling to the $200 level, the IDE controller became a hard drive interface, not a CD ROM interface. Robert Birmingham (the COJAG firmware programmer) and I figured out how to use the IDE interface, and Charlie Grisafi (master game hacker / programmer for "Area 51" & "Maximum Force") whipped up a compression algorithm and some game code and before we knew it, there were movies on the screen. If I remember correctly, there's about 23 minutes of movie on the "Area 51" hard drive and on the order of 50 minutes in "Maximum Force".

Question - What specifications and reasons for using a hard drive, over a CD ROM?

"Area 51" shipped with a one gigabyte hard drive, "Maximum Force" shipped with a two gigabyte drive (mostly Quantum, some IBM: they had the best quality). A CD ROM holds 650 Megabytes, but there are two main problems with a CD ROM: Reliability, and data throughput. A 2X CD ROM maxes out at 300 Kilobytes per second. Our 1 GIG Quantum drive did 4.5 Megabytes per second max (in our configuration). Keep in mind that at 4.5 Megs per second, COJAG couldn't do anything else (except put pixels on the screen). The only advantage to a CD ROM is cost, about half the cost of a hard drive.

Question - Tell us about growing up in the "classic", 8-bit video game era, and how that may have affected your interest in video games and ultimately lead to you

working for Atari?

Like you, I grew up during the height of the video game industry. The late seventies/early eighties were magical times for a pre-teen/teen brat, like myself. My family purchased its first video game, an OEM Atari VCS (from Sears), for Christmas of 1980 or 1981. I can't remember exactly when because time eludes a thirteen-year-old. Tank and Adventure became my favorite games. My Step Father Merrill preferred Kaboom, but games which cause that much stress turn me off.

The name "Atari" became a magical term for me during those years, but soon the Atari VCS market crashed and I moved on to high school where I learned how to use Apple 2 machines. The first home computer I could afford was the TI-99 4/A, which taught me how to program BASIC, but didn't have much else going for it.

I think it was my senior year in high school I received a Commodore 64, I learned 6502 assembly and got a real sense of computer architecture by learning how to program the 64's graphics chip. I designed a sprite controller that ran on Vertical blank interrupt. I wonder how many times the re invention of that wheel became an educational tool for aspiring computer game programmers.

The only thing I knew for sure during that time is that I wanted to design computers, not program them. That's why I pursued an Electrical Engineering degree and not a Computer Science degree.

The college years were like all the rest of my time in school, boring ...boring ... boring. Few teachers and fewer classes could inspire my interest. I was the classic underachiever, but I wouldn't know that until I got my first job.

I got a job in research, through a contact made by my best friend, programming lasers to test the properties of plastics. I wrote code in Pascal. I realized then, that reality is much more interesting than school. I think that if I had a better attitude while attending school, it would have seemed more real and I would have done better. No point in thinking about that too much, it's not as if I can go back and change it.

I barely have a degree in Electrical Engineering from the University of Pittsburgh. The degree helped train my mind, but didn't interest my heart in the slightest.

After graduating, my best friend, Sarvesh invited me to Silicon Valley where he had just started a job at Acuson. I looked for a job and was hired in the last minute by Sigma Designs. I flew home, packed up and drove back to California. At Sigma I realized just how fast I can learn if I apply myself. I began to grow from a child of 23 into a adolescent of 24. After working at Sigma for a year and a half, my boss, and then his boss and then the VP all got fired. I decided Sigma might be having some problems and began to scan the newspaper for other opportunities.

An ad with the Atari Fuji caught my eye. Atari was seeking a Hardware Engineer with five years experience. I didn't have the prerequisite experience, but I sent them a resume anyway. They ultimately called me because they had scaled back the budget and were looking for someone with less experience, i.e. someone who cost less money. They hired me after two interviews and it seemed like a dream come true, like somehow my life had come full circle and I find it amazing that I grew up with Atari, and matured at Atari Games.

The Atari legend is bigger inside the company than outside. The stories and myth that are told by the legends who work there make the place seem larger than life. In a very real sense the people who work there and the creative genius that flows from there _is_ larger than life. I have never met a more creative and talented group of individuals.

Question - Was the "Area 51" hardware your first design at Atari, and what else have you worked on?

The "Area 51" hardware was my first successful project at Atari. I created two other hardware designs that were based on the hardware work initiated by Pat McCarthy ("Gauntlet") and John Moore ("RBI Baseball" & "Batman"). Unfortunately, this hardware

never shipped.

The titles of the Atari Game Corporation games that never shipped probably out number or at least equal the games that do ship, during a good year. The game industry is a lot like the movie industry in that you can't tell whether a game is a hit until you put it on the street, and you can't put it on the street until its mostly done. Which means a company spends millions of dollars to find out the game is too different, not attractive enough, too hard to play or in the words of some game testers: "just plain sucks."

The games I worked on that never shipped are: "Arcade Classics" (a remake of "Missile Command" and "Millipede"), "Cyberstorm" (a robot fighting game that just couldn't make the grade: good concept, but the technology over limited the ideas to the point where it wasn't any good), "Freeze the Cat" (a COJAG) puzzle game that is pretty good, but puzzle games just don't fly in the US these days unless they're Japanese and cost a hundred bucks), "Primal Rage II" (a fighting game sequel that was good, but not good enough. This game was designed for a Coin Op Sony Playstation, I just added a hard drive controller). The last game I can think of is: "Vicious Circle" a COJAG based fighting game that could not get enough bandwidth from the hardware to be fun enough.

If you ask the game programmers and designers of those games what their biggest limitation is, they'll tell you its hardware. And that always seems to be the case. If they could just get 10 or 20 percent more from the hardware they could make the game really fun. It most cases they're right, the hardware did limit them. But for some reason, the game programmers that make hits are the ones that get what they can from the hardware and make their ideas fun anyway. There's a fine line between not enough hardware to make a fun game and not enough creativity, uniqueness and inspired lunacy (don't laugh, its true) to make the hardware cough up fun pixels.

As far as games that were shipped are concerned, I did the serial link for "Space Lords" by Ed Logg and Bob Flanagan along with a plethora of other talented individuals. "Area 51" and "Maximum Force", were made by Charlie Grisafi, Rob Rowe, Robert Weatherby, and yet another huge cast of talented graphic artists and game designers. My gun logic still lives on in "Area 51: Site 4" (shipping now).

The firmware engineers I've worked with (whose code holds the game code together) are: Robert Birmingham, Mike Albaugh, Dave Shepperd, Forrest Miller.

Question - Where are you working now and would you like to get back in the VG industry again sometime?

I am now working for Diamond Multimedia. I'm designing with the NVidia Riva-TNT Video ASIC. I think that I'll eventually get back to the video game industry but it will likely be an online interactive game company. I don't think consoles (as they are today), PCs and Coin Op games are going to last forever. I get the feeling that within ten years there will be a new platform with a whole new way of doing things. These machines will be small portable and on the internet all the time. Just think about the bizarre games we could think up when the hardware is on the person, not on top of their TV.

Question - I hear that you still enjoy playing the older games. What do you think about MAME, and what are your favorites?

MAME, in my opinion, is the coolest hack since Tesla first switch on his 100 foot lighting generator, just to see what it would do. I know that Atari Games, Midway, Sega, Capcom and all the rest don't like MAME because it promotes infringement of ROM copyrights, but man what a cool idea! Because of these pioneers we will be able to play these games in their original form for all eternity. Even if the hardware disintegrates, and the companies all die, the code will live on and entertain people. I salute those crazy emulator-writing fools.

I like a bunch of MAME games, but Star Wars, and Marble Madness were great games and thanks to MAME, they still are!

On a more personal note: congrats to the people who broke Slapstick (the hardware

protection for many of Atari Games games. Pat McCarthy couldn't believe it. The fact is you were the first to truly reverse engineer the thing.

Name: Brian McKee

Began in the industry - 1992 for Atari Games Corporation

Hardware projects that shipped:Coin Ops: Area 51, Maximum Force, and Space Lords

Hardware that didn't make it.Arcade Classics, Cyberstorm, Freeze the Cat, Primal Rage II, and Vicious Circle.

[Interview by Alan Hewston, who returned to retrogaming in February 1998 with his original collection of 44 Atari 2600 carts. Since then, he has become addicted to nearly all the classic game systems and now has over 650 carts for the Atari 400/2600/5200/7800/XEGS, Bally Astrocade, ColecoVision, Commodore 64, Intellivision, NES, Odyssey 2, Sega Genesis, SNES, and Vic 20]. Alan can be reached at: hewston95@stratos.net]

Classic Gaming Trivia

Two classic systems had light pens created for them, the Bally and the Vectrex. A third system had a touchpad that essentially did the same thing. That system was the Colecovision. Not surprising, all three attachments are extremely rare and expensive.

God bless the Commodore 64

by Geoff Voigt

In our travels to find the best game system, we often overlook the section of Home Computers. My first "system" was one, the Commodore 64, and thanks to friends, family, nameless hackers and my disk drive, I never ran out of new games to get. Everyone likes to tout the advantages of the gaming systems, but today, the C64 is going to be reviewed as if it was a game system, ignore the data basing and word processing stuff.

I tend to view the C64 as a Coleco or 5200 with most of the lumps taken out. The game quality of most C64 games surpasses those systems, and can reach NES standards. The controllers used on the C64 are the same as on the 2600 (dig out those Wico Command Controls..), and games that are generally considered high rares on most others are quite available with a disk drive for the 64 (Montezuma's Revenge, Mr. Do's Castle, Linking Logic, Tapper, Mountain King, Up N' Down, etc.).

There were 3 models of C64 released by Commodore: the "Classic" C64 (this is the one that most people think of whenever people mention it), the Commodore 64C, (which has a design similar to an Amiga keyboard and contains a different OS, called GEOS), and the "Portable" SX-64, which has its own 4" color monitor, 5 1/4 drive, and foldable case. The SX-64 is about as rare as an Emerson Arcadia, and always makes good (but extremely heavy) trade bait. Commodore also made a Commodore 128, which could run C64 programs as well as its own stuff, similar to the Atari 7800 being able to play 2600 games.

ADVANTAGES:

Price. the cost to get a C64 and a 1541 (or 1571, or 1581) disk drive are dirt cheap, and at most thrifts you shouldn't have to pay more than $15 total for a setup that should include one of those elephantine power supplies for the computer, and all the cables you need to power the drive, and connect it to the computer itself. Like the computer, C64 carts are quite inexpensive, and can usually be had for a quarter of the price of the 2600 or Colecovision versions, on the collector market. My C64 James Bond was given to me because the person who had it wasn't much of a C64 collector. (That reminds me, I still owe him for that...)

Great sound! the C64 has 3 sound channels, and a wide bevy of potential sound voices. The best games that feature this are Head Over Heels, the Human Race, Spy Vs Spy, the

Great Giana Sisters, and anything done by Ron Hubbard.

The greatest advantage of the C64 is that fact that with the help of a PC and a lovely little device called a X1541 cable, you can have all the games you can eat; just get a transfer program, such as Star Commander or X1541, (both are easily obtainable off the net; URL's are at the end of this article) and enough 5 1/4 disks to hold your amusements, and *BINGO!* instant game collection. With these tools, rarity becomes a moot point, and you can spend your time enjoying great games, rather than trying to find those elusive carts. But it's still fun looking for them, just like any system....

THE DISADVANTAGES: (Hey, no system is perfect!)
The 5200 and Inty have their controllers, the 2600 has it's block graphics, and the C64 has it's disk load time. Quite often one can start a game to load, go make a sandwich, and then come back to find the game in question only about 3/4 loaded into the system. This can be solved by getting a Fast Load cart; they're not too hard to find, and can make a big difference in loading time. Just remember that typing the pound sign and then hitting return brings up the menu, and that "% [filename]" (without the quotes) loads the game.

Potential bulky size, with the drive and the system together. But if you have a Colecovision with it's expansion sets, and/or an Atari 5200, you're used to this.

THE GAMES:
Now's the time we get to the core matter, Great games. Anytime I start up my C64, I always find myself playing the following games:

JUMPMAN, and it's sequel JUMPMAN JUNIOR: Can you defuse all the bombs in time? These two games are a perfect blend of cerebral logic, and arcade action. the first game has 30 levels, each with it's own unique charm. the second game has only 12 levels, but all are just as good as any found in the first game. By Epyx.

The ARCHON series: Strategy games where capturing pieces is a hard-fought battle, Literally. These are up there as two of the best head-to-head games ever made; Archon 1 takes Chess to a new extension on the computer, while Archon 2 creates a wonderful strategy game that could only exist on a computer. There is an Archon 3 out there for the C64, but it's either a very early beta that was never intended for release, or the greatest practical joke I've ever seen pulled on the gaming community, and I'm including "2600 Doom" in that statement. Both are from Electronic Arts.

HEAD OVER HEELS: A quirky puzzle-exploration game that has sleeping dogs "Hush Puppies", as 2-ups, Prince Charles as a Dalek from the British TV show Dr. Who, and the meanest toasters I've ever dealt with in a game. Obviously a game from Britain, but don't let this stop you from trying it out; I rather like its atmos. It takes a while to get a rating higher than "Dummy", but it's worth it. Wonderful music and sounds. Done by Ocean Publishing.

SHAMUS: CASE 2: The twitch game with a mission. The 'battle' screens have a perfect fast pace, and the glitch of being able to jump up ladders saves your bacon multiple times. May God be with you when the battle screen turns purple though. Done by Synapse.

MARIO BROS.: This is the only home version I've ever seen that has the floor change to the appropriate pattern when the level changes, and has all the characters look as they do in the arcade. I only wish that it had the "roamer" fireball, and that the Slipice froze the floor. Probably a leaked Beta from Atarisoft.

MR. DO'S CASTLE: This is the best home version I've ever played of this game. Period. Everyone and everything moves as it should, the Unicorns have a fair amount of intelligence, and the music and sounds are nice to listen to. If you have issues with either the Coleco or 5200 version, give this one a try. By Parker Bros.

Q*BERT: A near perfect port of the arcade game. It has the starting animation for each level, possibly the best sound, and all the rounds are accurate to their arcade counterparts. Would've been nice to also have Ugg and Sam in the game, but it does have

Wrong Way and Slick, who take care of all of your irritation needs. Also by Parker Bros.

MAIL ORDER MONSTERS: It was the thought of being able to play MOM again that induced me to re-build my C64 collection. A genre that has been revisited by more modern games such as Monster Rancher on the Sony, and Pokemon for Game Boy. Buy a creature, gear it up with eugenic enhancements and conventional weapons, and then set it out on a mission to either destroy another player/monster, flag tag, or battle "The Horde". This game will have you lose track of days. Another winner by EA.

THE GREAT GIANA SISTERS : This one's fun to pull out to see the reactions of other people, when they realize just how close it is to Nintendo's Super Mario Bros., so close, in fact, that Nintendo was able to have it pulled from the shelves. I strongly suggest that you play using the hack that give infinite lives, however. A Time Warp production.

DINO EGGS: A C64 exclusive, as I recall. A Coleco version was mentioned, but never came about. A nice, quiet, collection climber that has probably the one of the best learning curves in all of the games available. Start a fire as soon as possible to avoid Dino Mom, and jump over the hatched dinos (without touching them) to cage them. A special treat is in store for DE-VO fans if you die a certain way.

To answer any possible questions, a X1541 cable can be easily made using the instructions found in either of the transfer programs mentioned above, or they can be bought at any of the modern stores who carry Commodore products. I intend to give detailed instructions on how to transfer in a later article.

C64 Links:

http://www.seattlelabs.com C64S emulator.

This is the C64 Emulator I use on my PC. A wonderful piece of work by the people at Seattle Labs. I should warn you that the shareware version self-terminates after 10 minutes.

http://www.Arnold.c64.org

The great archive of all things C64, from manuals, utilities to games. Its FTP counterpart is ftp.arnold.hiof.no.

ftp.funet.fi/pub/cbm/c64

the best place to find X1541 and Star Commander, the two transfer programs mentioned above.

http://www.emucamp.com/c64/

The C64 Arcade Page; devoted exclusively to Arcade ports for the Commie.

http://www.ozemail.com.au/~gvincent/

An Australian C64 page I frequent.

http://www.cis.ohio-state.edu/hypertext/faq/bngusenet/comp/sys/cbm/top.html

The home to the Beastly thing called the Commodore Business Machines FAQ. It's extremely large, (9 parts!) but answers almost any question you could have.

(Geoff Voigt is a devoted C64 player and collector who's currently waiting for 4-year Fine Art Schools to accept him. He is also searching for the Atarisoft version of C64 Donkey Kong Jr., and a working version of C64 Bounty Bob Strikes Back, be either of them actual copies or just disk images. He can be contacted at gvoigt@ridgecrest.ca.us).

Separated at Birth

Winky the lead character from Venture and Evil Otto, the villain from Berzerk and Frenzy.

Video Game Collector/Player Species

As with nature, there are different forms of video game collectors/players. So we are here today to catalog the different species. See which one you fall into.

The Cheetah-These are the ones who rush ahead of everyone else and get the systems before they are even released in this country. If you already own a Dreamcast, most likely you are a cheetah.

The Lion-These are the ones who get the new systems when they are released in this country. They usually have at least two or possibly all of the new systems. They also tend to get the hot, new games as they are released. If you have recently bought games like Zelda, Metal Gear Solid or any other newer release, you are probably a lion.

The Hyena-When a system is on its last legs and begins to look old, that is when the hyenas rush in. This is usually the time when the cost of a system has been cut a few times and there is alot of bargain software. The system is still alive, but barely.

The Vultures-As the system has expired and there is nothing more coming out, then the vultures circle in to finish it off. The games and system are usually a fraction of the original price and the retail and rental stores are dumping them. If you just bought your first Virtual Boy or Sega Saturn, you are probably a vulture.

Note that many people are a combination of different animals. I personally am part hyena/vulture. Pretty scary to think what that would look like. Remember this is just for fun and really don't mean to call you a vulture (yeah right!).

G.O.T.C.H.A.

by Hugh Falk

Hugh Falk's Computer Gaming Site (http://people.ne.mediaone.net/hughfalk) is proud to host the newest tribute to old games -- the Gaming Obsession Throughout Computer History Award (GOTCHA). GOTCHA was created in 1999 to pay homage to the greatest personal computer games of all time. For each year (starting in 1977) the best computer game in each genre receives the GOTCHA honor. The earliest year of copyright determines the year for qualification -- even if the game was actually released in a different year. GOTCHAs are only given to commercially available personal computer games that are at least eight years old.

At the current time, each game mentioned on the GOTCHA page can only be considered a nominee. The GOTCHA committee is still forming and votes are still coming in from site visitors. By May, we expect all votes to be tabulated and nominees to become GOTCHA winners. However, the winners are not guaranteed to hold their spot forever. If a convincing argument can be made for an alternate, changes can be made. Reader responses are weighed heavily into choosing the GOTCHA winners.

Once the initial GOTCHA winners are chosen, a screenshot of each game will be placed on the site and a summary explaining why it won will be written.

The formal announcement of the winners is expected to take place at the Classic Gaming Expo (http://www.cgexpo.com/) held in Las Vegas at the Plaza Hotel on August 14-15, 1999. Then, each January, the newest eight-year-old GOTCHA nominees will be announced. If you have an interest in classic PC gaming, please join in the voting.

Visit the GOTCHA page at: http://people.ne.mediaone.net/hughfalk/awards.htm

Please send your votes for GOTCHA nominees to hughfalk@mediaone.net .

Why is it?

Why is it that Coleco would spend more time and money on developing add-ons than they did on supporting them?

My Favorite Joystick

One question I have been asked on numerous occasions is which classic joystick is my

favorite? Is it the venerable Atari 2600 joystick? No. How about the much maligned Colecovision stick? Definitely not! Well then, what is Tom's favorite stick? Since you asked, I will tell you. It is the Prostick II, the best classic stick made, in my opinion. Why you ask? Let me tell you!

The first thing you will notice about the Prostick II is that it is sturdy! No cheap plastic stick here! It is made to last against the harshest games (even Decathlon, though I did break one on this game, but after many tournaments). The stick had a lifetime warranty when it came out!

The second great feature with the stick is it has the ability to switch from four way to eight way. Just twist a plastic insert and you are switched. I cannot tell you how much nicer it is to play games like Q*Bert or Frogger with four way! No more going in a direction that doesn't exist in a game! This feature alone is worth the price.

The joystick was made for the Atari 2600, but I use mine with the Colecovision and a Y adapter. By the way, if you want to get this great stick, let me know. My Uncle Ron bought out the stock of the company years ago and still has some in stock. I do not know the price he charges as I bought my sticks from him back in 1982 and they still work like a charm!

eBay Notes

A big surprise in eBay has been an increase in the prices received for TI 99/4A games and systems. This system was neglected for the longest time. This was probably the only system more neglected than the Odyssey II and that is saying alot! But recently, I have seen systems sell for $25-$30, which may not seem like alot, but it is compared to the $10-$20 it was fetching a year ago. Not only this, but some of the games have gone in the double figures. We are talking a system where games would go unbid, even with starting prices as low as a buck each. Could this be a turnaround for the very good, but overlooked system?

Speaking of the Odyssey II, the prices have been slowly climbing on this forgotten little system. Even the games are inching up a little. Games that used to get a buck or two, can sometimes pull in double that amount. While it may not seem like alot, it is a start. If you are looking for a great bargain in classic games, there is none better than the Odyssey II. You can still get a system and about 20 games for around $40.00. Sometimes a few of those games are a bit rarer. I have seen collections like this where a couple Rare to Extremely Rare games are part of it. Games like Attack of the Timelord, PT Barnum, Killer Bees and even the board games. Even on occasion, I have see a voice module included!

While the Odyssey II will never be in the same class as the Atari 2600 in terms of desirability or price, it will go up in price. This may be your last chance to get them at the dirt cheap prices they are at now.

What's Happening in the Hobby?

Once again we had some interesting topics in the newsgroups. Here is a small sample of what was on the minds of classic gamers.

Game Shows Announced-The Classic Gaming Expo has set an official date and have been announcing their guests. There was some excitement as two of their guests are none other than Ralph Baer and Nolan Bushnell. I don't think I need to go into their histories as anyone who is familiar with classic games knows these two men. Many other guests have been lined up and it is looking like a great show! It will be August 14th and 15th and I will be attending!

The other show announced is the Jagfest for fans of the Atari Jaguar and all other Atari systems. This show will also be in the summertime.

Nice Thrift Store Employees-Some people told of pleasant experiences with employees at thrift stores. Some were even invited into the backroom! I personally never experienced a nice person at a thrift store. Most of the people seem to have a condescending attitude If you think about it, a thrift store is one step below a garage sale and one step above the dump.

Rarest Games-It started with what was the rarest Intellivision game (the general consensus was Turbo), then it went to the Atari 2600 (not counting prototypes, the top ones were Magicard, Video Life, Cubicolor, Eli's Ladder and a few others).

Least Supported System-This was a thread I started as I wanted to find out if any systems were less supported than the Adventurevision (with a whopping 4 games) and Action Max (with a stunning 5 games). They seem to be the lowest, though there were a few systems that were close (but one the Supergraphix (I think), could play Turbographix games.

Not What We Thought They Were

Way back in issue #13, I told you about some mystery carts I had found. Well, it turns out they are actually an overseas version of the Emerson Arcadia. They just took the games and changed the shapes and in some cases the names. Hard to think a system like the Emerson Arcadia, which was a flop in the USA, could be in so many different markets. Since that article, I have traded the games away. Knowing that my chances of ever having a system to play them on was slim at best, I figured they would be better in the hands of someone who could appreciate them. But for a moment, I had the only known copy of Basketball for the Emerson Arcadia.

If you want to find out more about these carts and other Emerson Arcadia stuff, check out Ward Shrake's great site. Here is the address: http://members.aol.com/virtmus1/index.htm

New Atari Roms available!

In the past few months, there has been a whole slew of Atari games made available for emulation! Some prototypes and some hard to find games are among the latest selection! Here is a list of the latest additions:

*Dumbo's Flying Circus
*Tomcat F14 Simulator
*Donald Duck's Speedboat
*Quadrun
*Glacier Patrol
*Berenstein Bears
*Subterranea
*Ikari Warriors
*Robin Hood
*Sir Lancelot
*Moonsweeper

These games and many more, along with emulators to run them can be found at the Atari 2600 Nexus. Here is the address to this great page (tell Alex I sent you there). http://ccwf.cc.utexas.edu/~bilstein/atari2600nexus/index.html

Why is it?

Why is it that there were numerous Disney related games created, but only one was

officially released? The only released game was Sorcerer's Apprentice.

How To Get Free Games!

I know this sounds like one of the many get rich quick scams that pollute the internet, but it is real! It may not be for everyone, but if you are willing to get your hands dirty, you may find some good stuff.

Here is what you do. Whenever you go to a garage sale and see video games that you aren't really interested in, like an Atari with common games or whatever, write down the address of the house and come back on trash day. You will be surprised how many times these same games will end up in the trash!

I know you are all thinking, poor Tom has to stoop to garbage picking, what a sad soul. But don't think of it as garbage picking, rather look at it as a rescue operation. You are taking poor, unwanted video game systems and rescuing them from a sure death. Instead of rotting away in a landfill, you are giving them a second chance! Much like the dogs at the pound, Ataris need a good loving home and someone who will care for them and play with them. They need someone like you to save them.

Last year, I went to 20 houses (yes, I did keep track) on trash day after I saw games at garage sales, and at seven of those houses I found video games! Granted there were no Crazy Climbers or anything like that (I would have bought those kind of games outright), but I did yield quite a bit of stuff. Here is a list of my finds:

House #1-Atari 5200 system w/no joysticks, but there were over 20 common to uncommon games. The guy wanted $3.00 a game at the sale and refused to negotiate, so I waited for the ultimate deal. Someone must have bought the sticks or they were in another bag, oh well.

House #2-Odyssey II boxed with a stack of manuals. No games, but a dozen manuals and a cool poster of a bunch of the games. Also found a Nintendo and Playstation system boxes.

House #3-An Atari 2600, with 5 joysticks (two originals and three third party), set of paddles and ten common games.

House #4-Atari 2600 system in the box with Combat and Pacman.

House #5-Nintendo system with two copies of Super Mario Bros and Excite Bike. Only one controller.

House #6-Over thirty common to uncommon Atari games (I had been there earlier and bought all the good stuff like Tax Avoiders, Steeplechase, Star Wars Return of Jedi, etc...). There was also a handful of manuals and a Coleco Head to Head Baseball.

House #7-Box of Atari joysticks (four original and three third party). The system and games were nowhere to be found. Either someone else bought them or someone got to the trash before me.

While there wasn't anything incredible, I did find some stuff and made some decent money off it. So think about rescuing some unloved video games and giving them a second chance.

The Valley of the Centipede - Chapter Two

by Tom Zjaba

As I enter the darkness of night, I notice an unusual stillness. No sounds can be heard. Even the wind is still, which is not a good sign. But instead of trying to figure out the cause of the stillness, I take advantage of it and run through the streets. I know it will not last and I must make haste if I am to reach my destination. As I run up one street and onto another, the quiet comes to an end. As I turn the corner, I see a giant spider feasting on a poor horse. The horse was tied up outside the local tavern and the owner must be a stranger in

this town. I know this as it is still tied up to the post. No regular would ever leave a good horse out. I would help the poor beast, but I am too late. The spider's fangs have already pierced the beast and judging by the amount of flesh removed from the carcass, it has been dead for some time. Around the spider are the smaller fleas, which bounce around as they wait for the enormous creature to have its fill. Once the spider abandons the kill, they will go in and try to suck out any remaining blood. Knowing that my knife is not much good against a giant spider, I move back into the shadows. With the creature easily the size of ten grown men, an attack would prove suicidal. I know that I must get past the spider to get to the cave, but this will not be easy.

After a few moments, I move as close to the walls of the buildings as I can. They line the streets and are covered in darkness. I must stay as close to them as possible to avoid detection. If there is one thing I learned about the great beasts, it is that they don't have great vision. They are attracted to bright lights and movement. Knowing this, I was prepared and dressed myself in black clothing. I even put my golden hair under a dark hat to better conceal myself. If I move very slowly, I may be able to get past the beasts without being detected. So I inch my way slowly, but surely along the way. I take two steps and then pause. After a few seconds, I move another two steps. It is a slow and tedious action, but one that far better than a face to face confrontation with death. As I near the great spider, I try to conceal my disgust. While I know it is only nature, I cannot help but be disgusted by the spectacle that unfolds before me. The spiders are not the neatest eaters and they just tear through a victim, sending blood and entrails flying. As an organ flies off, a flea is quick to pounce on it and try to get the blood, before it oozes onto the dirt street.

As I near the great beasts and am but a dozen steps away from getting past them, I take extra precaution to conceal myself. But fate is not with me as I notice that one of the fleas is staring at me. Actually it is hard to tell if the pig sized creature is looking at me because their eyes are unlike a human's eyes. There is no pupil to show which direction they are looking. Only a cold stare through a hundred eyes. But when it makes a low shrill and leaps towards me, I know that I have been found. Before I can escape, the accursed thing grabs a hold of my leg and sticks its accursed needle like appendage into my leg to suck out my blood. As the pain from the attack reaches my brain, I let out a loud scream. Not a normal scream but an almost primal scream. One that originates in the very soul. The primal side of me, the part that fights to survive, no matter what the odds has taken over. Instinctively, I pull out my dagger and stick it deep into the creatures head, right between those soulless eyes. It lets out a much higher pitched shriek than its previous one as it loosens its grip on my leg and falls to its death. Its legs shake uncontrollably as the last ounces of life drain from it. But I do not have time to savor this minor victory as a much greater danger is nearing.

Before I can tend to my wound or retrieve my weapon, the massive spider turns around and faces me, as do the other fleas. Sensing fresh meat, it charges after me. Fighting off the pain of my wound, I run past the creature and push myself with every ounce of strength. Knowing how perilous the journey will be, I long to head home to my beloved. But I know that I must go forward, I must continue. The spider who is on my heels also convinces me that forward is the right choice. Luckily for me, the streets turn sharply and I can make some headway. While spiders are very fast when heading straight, they are not among the best when it comes to turning. My only problem is that the trail of blood I am leaving will make it easy for them to follow me and fatigue will soon overtake me. The loss of blood is also a concern as I am beginning to feel a bit lightheaded.

As I reach the outskirts of town, I head towards the river. While traveling the river will add time to my journey, I hope the cool waters will slow the bleeding and conceal my trail. Once I get out of town, I look back to see the spider still on my trail. He is about twenty paces behind. Lucky for me the fleas decided to stay behind and feast on the dead horse and their fallen mate.

Once I am out of town, I run up the hill and into the woods. I know that once I get into the thick of the woods, I will be safe from the spider. The dense forest is too hard for the creature to maneuver in and its size puts it at a serious disadvantage. Sensing safety, I slow up and walk towards the riverbank. As I plunge my hands into the cool water, I pull up

a handful and pour it over my wound. The chilled water feels good on my wound. I tear some material from my shirt and dip it into the rushing water. Then I pull it out and wrap it tightly around the wound, stopping the bleeding. While the spider is no longer a threat, I know the fleas will come looking for me. The trail of blood will be their guide and their sheer numbers will overcome me, especially since my weapon is still lodged into the head of the flea who assaulted me. Knowing that I must stop the trail, I jump into the river and run upstream. I stay this path for about ten minutes before jumping onto riverbanks and heading into the woods. This should hopefully conceal my path and give me a safe journey. I then run through the woods.

After what seems like hours, I limp up to a hill. My leg is burning in pain and I can see that the wound is still bleeding, though the flow has been slowed considerably. I hope the walk up the hill will be easier than it looks. I have found the pathway I was looking for and partway up the hill, I see a trail of smoke, billowing out of the cave. I have found my destination and now I just need the strength to make it up there.
(Tune in next month for Chapter Three.)

Conclusion

The biggest issue to date has come to a close. This issues also marks the most submissions to date. At this rate, I will only have to write an introduction and conclusion (like I would ever say that little). This also marks the end of the themed issues, at least for now. The reason for this is because I don't want to force our writers to have to write about a certain subject. We all know it is hard enough to keep coming up with articles about classic games, without restrictions. So tune in next month for the big 20th issue and hopefully some surprise! We have alot of stuff in store. Don't forget the chat and I hope to see you there! Until next month, keep those fire buttons pressed and keep those alien invaders at bay!

Answers

1. Skill Gallery, Space Station, Classics Corner, Adventure Territory, Race Track, Sports Arena, Combat Zone, Learning Center. (3 points each)
2. Pitfall! and Stampede. (3 points each)
3. Krylons. (3 points)

BONUS: Zylons. (2 bonus points; no bonus for using the same answer from #3 (i.e. knowing your answer is one or the other))

4. G.I. Joe: Cobra Strike, Party Mix (for Supercharger), Steeplechase, Street Racer (a.k.a. Speedway), Video Olympics (a.k.a. Pong Sports), Warlords. (3 points each; six known answers)
5. Blackjack, Breakout, California Games, Casino (a.k.a. Poker Plus), Decathlon, Fireball (for Supercharger), Summer Games, Winter Games.
(2 points each; eight known answers)
6. C-100. (3 points)
7. Centipede, Dig Dug, Joust, Ms. Pac-Man, RealSports Baseball, Mario Bros. I did not count Pole Position because the 7800 version was Pole Position II. (3 points each; six known answers)

Covert Relationships

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1. All had Atari Force mini-comics packed with them at one point. (2 points)
2. Both came packaged with overlays. (Star Trek had one for the joystick; Space Shuttle for the console. This was unusual for a 2600 game, but common for Intellivision and Colecovision. Too tricky?) (3 points)

Club Corner

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1. Activisions and Numb Thumb News. (2 points each)
BONUS: Colecovision Experience and Odyssey^2 Adventure (Magazine).
(2 bonus points each)
2. All were part of the Atari Club's Video Game Masters Competition.
As a hint, I included it in this section, as opposed to Covert Relationships.
(3 points)

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100 points plus 6 bonus points. Give yourself five bonus points for any correct answer I don't list. Modifying rankings created by John Matthews:

00 - 30 points : You are as common as a Combat cartridge.
31 - 50 points : You are as uncommon as a Bridge cartridge.
51 - 70 points : You are as rare as a Snoopy and the Red Baron.
71 - 90 points : You are as extremely rare as a Crazy Climber.
91 - 99 points : You are as unbelievably rare as a Swordquest:Waterworld
100+ points : You are a prototype, probably a Tempest.

Tom Zjaba

(Some of the pictures are provided by the Digital Press CD. Possibly one of the best deals out there. To get your own copy, go to http://www.xnet.com/~skelly/ or http://digitpress.com and order one).