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MAME Reviews

This will be one of the few articles that will continue after Retrogaming Times ends. I plan on doing some more reviews on the website from time to time. So here are a few that will end up in my arcade section down the road!

(I don't think this is what they meant by too much exposure to the sun could be hazardous to your health.)

Rock Climber

One of the things that I do on MAME is to scan through the games and look for gems. Since I went so long between versions, there are a ton of games that I missed. Many are fighting games, but there are gems that pop along. One of these games is Rock Climber which is very similar to Crazy Climber. It has the same controls as Crazy Climber as well as the same objective, get to the top alive, but most of the similarities end there. The game actually plays closer to a cross between Hyper Crazy Climber for the Playstation and Alpiner for the TI computer. I know that these are not exactly well known games, but it is the best that I can come up with.

(No that is not part of the picture missing, it is an obstacle. Just don't ask what kind of obstacle it is.)

When I first started playing this game, I found it very hard to do well. For some reason the joysticks just did not respond very well. I had it set the same way as Crazy Climber but moving up and down just did not work well. I knew it wasn't my Devastator 2, but I loaded up Crazy Climber just to be sure. Sure enough, Crazy Climber played perfect (For anyone who is debating between a four way and eight way joystick, know that Crazy Climber is among a handful of very popular games that need eight way to play it like the arcade. And you can add Robotron, Space Dungeon, Berzerk, Frenzy, Sinistar and quite a few others to that list. Take my word for it and go with eight way, you can play four way with an eight way controller, but not vice versa). So I tried something crazy, I switched the up and down on each joystick. And know what, it worked! Suddenly I went from getting stuck on every obstacle to being able to blow through the first mountain with no problem. Sometimes the answer is right under your nose.

The gameplay is very similar to Crazy Climber. You need to get to the top of the mountain and everything wants to stop you. There are birds, monkeys, a creature that is best described as the purple people eater and more. As you can see by the above photos, you have big white blocks that drop at you and a creature that resembles the sun. You really do not know what twisted thing is up the mountain.

(Take a good look at that screen as it is as good as it gets)

Shark Attack

Imagine the Intellivision classic Shark! Shark! but you are the shark and instead of eating fish, you are eating divers. Sounds pretty good right? In theory it is, but the final product is repetitive. It is a good example of one good idea and nothing more.

You start the game off as a shark. You can move anywhere on the screen, which is pretty much blank. It is actually blue, but there are no other fish or plants or anything. On each screen are four divers. It is always four divers, no matter how many screens you clear. They do change colors from level to level and more a little quicker, but they are the same four divers. It is your job to eat them before they kill you. That is the whole game in a nutshell. Soon you realize that it gets very boring to just swim around the same drab level and fight the same guys over and over. There are a few nice touches. The divers do have some nice color combinations on their diving suits and the animations are pretty humorous. From the shark chewing up the divers to the shark slowly dying with the spear sticking in his back, it has its moments. Also, once you complete a level there is a skull that looks back and forth. Complete a bunch of levels and you have a whole group full of skulls looking around.

(That is the big selling point of the game, eating divers and showing blood.)

There is a bit of strategy to the game. First off, do not jump in the middle of the four divers. You can only kill one at a time and the others will make a pin cushion out of you. Instead try to move around and wait for them to split up. Once they do, pick them off one at a time. Also, do not swim directly at a diver or he will shoot you with his spear gun. Instead try to get him from behind or from above or below. Your chances of success will improve dramatically this way. It only took a few games for me to be able and clear through five or more levels with no problem.

While some may say that the game came out in 1980 and that is a big reason for its weak gameplay, keep in mind that this is the same year that such great games as Battlezone, Crazy Climber, Defender, Tempest, Pacman, Star Castle and Wizard of Wor came out so that is a weak excuse. The game is an example of a clever gimmick (being a shark and being able to kill divers) and not adding much else to it. It is fun for a few minutes, but you will soon tire of it and move onto a game with more substance.

(See the piggies, little piggies playing with the bombs)

Butasan

I always like to choose one bizarre game each month and this month it is Butasan. The game is a cross between Bomberman and Food Fight but played with pigs. Once again the Japanese show us how to make a unique game. But I must say that it is a simple and very enjoyable game.

Like Bomberman, it is your goal to blow up everyone else on the screen. You play the role of a pig wearing a dress (at least it looks like a polka dotted dress to me, I am not an expert on swine styles so I could be wrong) and you have to pick up bombs that are laying around the screen and throw them at the other pigs, who are not wearing dresses. Each bomb has a timer on it and it counts down (once you throw it). But if you throw a bomb at another pig or get hit by one, it will blow up and make any bombs nearby go off. Also if a bomb counts down to zero, it will also go off. You can also duck as a bomb is coming at you.

Besides throwing bombs, you can also pick up some different power-ups which give you different abilities for a limited time. There are also some mini games, one of which is very similar to whack-a-mole. These help make the game more interesting. And the best part is the pigs! At the start of each level, you will be greeted by what new pigs appear on the level. The will come out and dance around or act silly. They look different and act different, so there is a lot of character.

The name of the game is translated to mean Mr. Pig and it was only available in Japan. It came out in 1987, the same year as Bomberman so it is not known if either game was an influence on the other (similar to the Mr. Do/Dig Dug scenario). There are quite a few difference between the two as this game takes place in a wide open field where Bomberman takes place in mazes. Also, this one has mini games, the ability to duck and bombs that count down. But both games feature throwing bombs and power-ups, so there are some similarities. This game also allows up to two players at once, making it one more fun two player game.

(This is the scene you see when the game is over. Not sure what it means, but it is pretty disturbing.)

No matter if it was influenced or did influence, it is still a very fun game and one I recommend. We cannot have enough two player games and with a shortage of games featuring pigs, there is always room for one more pig game!

New Atari 2600 Game Reviews

By David Mrozek, www.videogamecritic.net

I'm been running The Video Game Critic for nearly five years now, but did you know that Tomorrow's Heroes and Tom Zjaba were the early inspirations for my site? That's right, I was on Tom's site all the time as I first started getting into the classic gaming scene. I especially enjoyed his reviews, and you may have noticed that I shamelessly pilfered his grading system and writing style. I've been a loyal reader of Retrogaming Times for many years, and it was an honor to have many of my reviews published in this fine electronic periodical. It's sad that this is the last issue, but thanks to the Internet, these issues will be enjoyed for hundreds of years to come (if not thousands). Thanks Tom, for a job well done. Now take a vacation for Pete's sake!

In order to commemorate this final issue, I'd like to take a look at some relatively new Atari 2600 games. Some are newly programmed titles that really push the limits of the system, and some are formerly unreleased games that provide an interesting look back at the "golden years" of video games. Enjoy.

Allia Quest (Ebivision 2001) B

Ebivision's last two games (Merlin's Walls and Pesco) were pretty bad, but I'm happy to

report that they're back on track with Allia Quest, so grab your favorite joystick and get ready for some good old-fashioned shooting action! A simple shooter at heart, Allia adds its own unique twist to the Megamania style of gameplay. Your ship is situated at the middle and bottom of the screen, and it never actually moves. Instead approaching targets shift in response to pushing the joystick left or right. It works quite well. The surprisingly large targets are a non-descript mix of colorful shapes, and your rapid-fire shooting causes them to disintegrate nicely. The action is simplistic but addictive and fun. I advanced a bit further each time I played, and couldn't wait to see what the next wave had in store. Understated, deep tones provide some interesting background noise. Allia Quest is a pleasant surprise, and a perfect fix for classic gamers looking for something fresh.
1 player

Alligator People (Fox 1983) C
This old Fox prototype was recently dug up and is currently available at www.sunmark.com. While I'd hardly call its gameplay addicting, Alligator People is an interesting title nevertheless. The playing field consists of moving walls that create an ever-changing maze. You control an orange syringe, and need to keep moving to avoid getting crushed by the walls. Three infected humans line both the top and bottom of the screen, and your goal is to cure them by shooting them up with serums scattered around the screen. While you're collecting serums, the people gradually change from humanoid to alligator form, and the transformation looks pretty wild by Atari 2600 standards. It looks even better when you transform them back with a series of quick successive shots. Complicating matters are alligators that slowly move across the screen, but these are easy to avoid. Alligator People is quite innovative but comes up short in the fun department, which may explain why it wasn't originally released.
Recommended variation: 9AB.
1 player

Adventure Plus (Atari Age 2002) NA
This hack of Atari's classic game Adventure features redrawn graphics and a whole new maze layout. Objects like the bridge and chalice certainly look better, but that sword looks like a big boat anchor. The dragons are larger and better detailed than those "ducks" in the original game, but they still don't look quite *right* to me. Doesn't anybody know how to draw a freakin' dragon?! At least the new screen layout is refreshing, rekindling memories of the

first time I played the original game. I must admit that I enjoy the thrill of discovery that Adventure Plus delivers. The classic gameplay is timeless fun, and running from dragons is even more exciting when you don't know where the heck you're going. The label art is also quite good.
1 player

Cat Trax (Atari Age 1983) B-
Released along with two other long-lost Atari 2600 titles (Pleiades and Funky Fish), Cat Trax may be the best of the bunch. Sure it's a conventional maze game at heart, but the graphics look sharp and the control is tight. You guide a cat around the screen with three dogs in hot pursuit. To be honest, you're only steering a cat *head*, and those dogs look more like mice. That's okay - we can pretend. Anyway, like any reputable maze game, there are tunnels on each side of the maze and bonuses (cat nip in this case) that appear periodically in the center of the screen. Instead of power pills, a green potion randomly appears in the upper area of the screen, tranforming you into - you guessed it - a dogcatcher truck. While this graphical transformation probably wouldn't qualify as morphing in the strictest sense of the term, it still looks pretty darned nifty. Cat Trax is challenging enough thanks to the fairly intelligent dogs that tend to change directions unexpectedly. The upper corners of the maze are easy places to get trapped, so for the love of God, stay out of there. There's nothing spectacular here, but the game serves its purpose. Cat Trax is available from Atari Age.
1 player

Funky Fish (Atari Age 1983) D-
Yes, Funky Fish has finally made his not-so-eagerly-awaited arrival on the 2600, much to the excitement of his legion of three fans. I think I now know why he's called Funky Fish - he stinks! Funky Fish resembles no other game from the past, present, and hopefully the future. In it, you move a slow-ass fish across an ugly, side-scrolling green ocean, while a Defender-like scanner on the top of screen tracks your four stationary targets. These four so-called "monsters" are evenly spaced out and apparently disguised as square blocks. Once you approach one, it excretes several odd shapes that move erratically. Touch one and your fish turns to bones and sinks to the sea floor. Fear not however, for Funky Fish has the ability to shoot those shapes, transforming them into - you guessed it - cherries you can ingest for bonus points. Once you've eaten a certain number of cherries, the

monster becomes defenseless, allowing you to sit on him until his energy completely drains. Slowly moving from one monster to the next is almost unbearable. Adding insult to injury, you can't simply move off one end of the scanner and re-emerge on the other side, which would have eased the pain dramatically. This game has some nice colors and satisfying sound effects, but it's a chore to play. Funky Fish is available from Atari Age. Get your copy today!
1 player

Pleiades (Atari Age 1983) C+
Now available for the first time thanks to the good people at Atari Age, Pleiades was one of those games programmed "back in the day" but never released. According to the instruction manual, Pleiades is the unofficial sequel to Phoenix, but personally I've never even heard of it. I'm guessing it never caught on because no one could pronounce its frickin' name. Anyway, this fun but uneven shooter features three completely unique stages. In the first, you control a cannon on a planet surface shooting aliens flying in various formations. These aliens move fast and drop a ton of bombs, but their movements are annoyingly choppy. Occasionally one will crawl across the bottom, creating a wall that you can shoot holes in. There's some scenery on the planet surface, but nothing particularly impressive. The off-key "music" that plays during this stage is simply awful. The second screen resembles the mother ship stage in Phoenix. This particular mother ship is large but chunky, with three trap doors that randomly open and close on its underbelly. Timing your shots, you must nail a little star that moves left to right across the center of the ship. Meanwhile, large birds swoop down, drop bombs, and block your shots. Like the first stage, it's moderately fun but over too quickly. The third screen is easily the most difficult and time-consuming. Your job here is to guide a slowly moving, triangular ship up a pyramid while avoiding scattered obstacles. This is where you'll lose 90% of your ships. Especially near the top of the pyramid, the airplane-shaped obstacles are too close together to avoid, and it gets frustrating. Pleiades is still worthwhile to play, thanks to its fast action and variety. I also appreciate the fact that it keeps the high score displayed on the screen at all times. Note: Despite what the manual says, set the left difficulty switch to B for a normal game, and A to practice.
1 player

Save The Whales (Games of the Century 2002) C-
Save The Whales was released for the first time at the 2002 Classic Gaming Expo, but it's actually an old, unreleased Fox game from 1984. To be honest, it looks and plays like a bargain bin title with its simple graphics and shallow gameplay. You guide a sub around the middle of the screen, just above a school of colored whales. A tanker on the ocean surface drops nets from above, and you must protect the whales by blasting the nets. The graphics are pretty standard, although the black puffs of smoke coming from the tanker's smokestack are eye-catching. There are four speed settings and some two-player modes that let a friend control the tanker. Setting the difficulty to 'A' changes the nets to harpoons, which are supposed to be harder to shoot, but I did not find that to be the case. Save The Whales is fast moving and difficult, and positioning your sub is key. The worst part of the game has to be the periodic "radioactive flotsam" that comb the screen between rounds. Although meant to add variety, these blobs are easy to shoot and just plain annoying. Overall, Save the Whales is a mildly amusing little game. I wouldn't call it a lost treasure, but 2600 fans should appreciate this little piece of the past.
1 or 2 players

Sword Fight (Retrotopia 2000) C+
Atari 2600 games with large characters are few and far between, but this two-player sword fighting game features some tall, well-animated fighters. It's too bad the developer couldn't secure a Star Wars license for this, because it would have made for a perfect light saber battle game. From the minute you see those swords power up, the Star Wars influence is obvious, and even the game description was written as if trying to avoid a lawsuit: "Two knights face each other at the edge of the universe. Gripping their 'laser swords', they advance, prepared to fight to the death...". Swordfight was programmed by one of Mattel's famous Blue Sky Rangers, Steve "Don't Sue Me" Tatsumi in 1983. While it was never released by Mattel, Retrotopia thankfully resurrected it in 2000. The joystick allows for three types of attacks (overhead, right, left), and three types of blocks. You can advance and retreat using the fire button. The manual claims that "once players get familiar with the moves, long and challenging battles are possible". I have to agree - the game gets better with repeated play. Sword Fight is an innovative title unlike anything else I've played on the

2600. Collectors should definitely try to pick up a copy.
2 players

Thrust (Xype 2000) A
Thrust is a far cry from the simplistic shooters so common on the 2600, and it's actually a conversion of an old Commodore 64 game. Thrust not only provides great arcade shooting action, but it also has surprising depth. Like Gravitar, you guide a triangle-shaped ship through winding underground caverns, destroying cannons and picking up fuel. Shooting nuclear reactors will temporarily disable the cannons, but too much damage can cause a meltdown. In later stages, there are switches on the walls that open new areas. Controlling your ship takes skill, because you must constantly thrust to counteract the effects of gravity. Pushing the joystick up thrusts, and pulling back activates a protective shield. Your ultimate goal is to pick up a pod at the bottom of each cavern and transport it out safely. When you finally locate the pod, the real challenge begins! It attaches to your ship via a cord, and swings precariously as you attempt to transport it through the narrow caverns without smashing it against a wall. It's a balancing act that requires excellent technique, and completing each mission is very satisfying. The crude graphics are large and blocky, but the animation is smooth and the control is flawless. The 24-level challenge is immense but rarely frustrating. There are even five levels of difficulty. Don't miss the best game to come along for the 2600 in a long time!
1 player

Skeleton+ (Atari Age/Eric Ball 2003) B+
Skeleton Plus (+) is a much-needed update to a game that held much potential but was somewhat undercooked. I imagine programmer Eric Ball caught plenty of flack about the lack of options and steep difficulty, and I'm happy to report he addressed those issues sufficiently in this version. Like the original game, you move through a first-person maze, trying to locate and zap one wandering skeleton at a time. The mazes are well rendered and you can navigate through them quickly and easily. The skeleton looks terrific, and you can even follow him around when you locate him (although he will turn on you). This "Plus" version displays the number of skeletons you've zapped on the bottom of the screen,

along with your life points, which drain each time you get touched by a skeleton. Since some skeletons require multiple "zaps" to kill, you sometimes have to play a little game of cat and mouse with them. The game has four options: skeletons per level (5 or 10), starting life meter (49 or 99), sound on/off, and skeleton speed. Unfortunately, two options are assigned to each difficulty switch, so there are only four combinations in total. Personally, I would have preferred if all 16 variations were accessible via the select switch. The "touch of death" mode is also accessible via the black/white switch, in case you preferred the unforgiving gameplay of the original game. I couldn't really recommend the first Skeleton game, but Skeleton+ is the real deal. You can purchase it from Atari Age.
1 player

Missile Command Trak-Ball (Thomas Jentzsch 2002) NA
It's somewhat ironic that the Atari 2600 trak-ball controller didn't support the ultimate trak-ball game: Missile Command. Anybody who grew up playing this classic at the local arcade knows that it was NOT designed with a joystick in mind. Thankfully, Thomas Jentzsch has addressed this long-standing problem with his new hack of the game, and you'll be surprised how big a difference it makes. You can whip that cursor clear across the screen in a flash, yet position it with perfect precision. Not only is this version faster and more arcade-like than the original, but you can look forward to shattering your previous high scores with ease. It will be very difficult to go back to using the joystick after playing this. Missile Command Trak-Ball is available at the Atari Age store.
Recommended variation: 8B
1 or 2 players

Power Off! (Ebivision 2002) C
The French company Ebivision has a checkered past when it comes to making new video games for the 2600. Their games tend to be either highly innovative (Marlin's Walls), or awfully derivative (Pesco). Power Off falls more into the latter category. The game screen consists of eight red platforms connected by ladders and patrolled by robots. You control a tiny man trying to gather sixteen blue blocks spread among the platforms - just like every other Atari 2600 game that came out in 1983! There's really nothing inventive about the Power Off. Heck, even the fire button doesn't even do anything! Once I started playing however, a funny thing happened - I couldn't stop. Just clearing the first screen required a heck of a lot more technique and strategy than I initially gave this game credit for. It's hard for several reasons. The robots tend to move side-to-side over the ladders, and your timing needs to be impeccable to scale one untouched. It doesn't help that it can be aggravatingly hard to get lined up properly with the ladder (much like Ebivision's Alfred Challenge). Even more frustrating is the fact that no matter how many blocks you've collected, once you die the board is completely repopulated! I can't tell you how many times I shouted the "F" word playing this game, especially when getting killed with only one or two blocks left. I do appreciate the innovative scoring system, which rewards the player for picking up consecutive blocks (their values increase by increments). Once you finally clear the screen (quite a feat), you proceed to another level with a different ladder layout and a new set of robots. The graphics are clean-looking, the robots are cool, and I like how your little guy scampers around. The audio is lame, and except for the musical title screen,

there’s not much to hear. Speaking of the title screen, I like how it scrolls instructions, but I think the text may have lost a little in translation, like when it claims robots are "haunting" the rooms.
1 player

Revenge of the Apes (Games of the Century 2003) C-
This recently-resurrected old Fox prototype is technically impressive, but leaves something to be desired in terms of gameplay. Obviously inspired by Planet of the Apes, you control a man marooned on a planet crawling with apes. To escape, he’ll need to make his way through numerous forest, river, village, desert, and cave screens to reach safety. The scenery is fairly chunky but the characters look good. In most screens, multiple apes approach from the left or right, and you shoot them for points. There are three types of apes: harmless chimps, fearsome orangutans, and gorillas that can shoot! I really like how your guy wades through the river with water up to his chest. Unfortunately, he can also get stuck in the scenery, which is frustrating. The scoring system is worthless, since you can just stay on one screen and shoot wave and wave of regenerating apes to pad your score. A better challenge is to see how many times you can escape before running out of life. While the gameplay is admittedly weak, several newly-added features make this game respectable. When captured, you’re treated to a full-screen graphic of a man behind bars, and it looks terrific. There’s also a Statue of Liberty ending which is equally impressive. You can also briefly glimpse the original ending, which looks pretty pathetic by comparison. And I can’t forget to mention the incredible soundtrack. While the unconventional music sounds terribly rough and distorted at first, these unique, edgy tunes fit the game well and really grow on you. Overall, Revenge of the Apes is a mediocre game, but the notable enhancements make this a must-have for collectors. This game can be ordered from Atari Age.
1 player

Pick Up (Games of the Century 2002) C

This unreleased 1983 Fox game was made available for the first time at the 2002 Classic Gaming Expo. Apparently its subject matter was considered somewhat risqué by early-80s standards, but the storyline and gameplay are remarkably original. You are a guy out to win over a girl by collecting the following gifts for her: a car, a flower, money, perfume, a wine glass, and a heart. These objects move side-to-side overhead, and by shooting guided missiles you try to collect one of each. Shooting the same item twice will cost you a life (or "chance", as this game calls it). The objects you've collected are displayed on the bottom on the screen, so you know what not to aim for. Collecting one of each item looks deceptively easy, but you often have to "thread the needle" to reach items at the very top of the screen. It's an interesting concept but to be honest it's not terribly fun. Once you've gathered all six items, you grab your lady by the hand and take her to the next screen, which shows a tiny hotel with two windows. This where you really score! After going through the front door, you hear some footsteps and see the shades get pulled down. Five seconds later your guy emerges, revitalized and ready to take on the next level! What a stud! In case you didn't notice, Pick Up isn't the most politically correct game. If not for the fact that you can switch the roles of the man and woman, the National Organization for Women would probably have already clamped down on this one.
1 player

Gunfight (Xype 2001) A
The successor to Outlaw has finally arrived 23 years later, and it's outstanding. Gunfight's musical intro features a superb rendition of the great Johnny Cash tune "Ring of Fire". As if that wasn't enough to earn Gunfight an instant "A", the gameplay itself is fast and exciting. The cowboys are well drawn, and can fire two bullets at a time. I can't emphasize how key this feature is, because it allows you to catch your opponent in various crossfires. Actually, you'll need to shoot him twice, since the first shot just takes off his hat! There is an impressive array of obstacles that separate the fighters, including cactus, stage coaches, rocks, arrows, and even a saloon! Using the right difficulty switch, you can select between a human opponent and a fairly skilled CPU outlaw. The left switch adjusts the speed of the bullets, and the black/white switch enables horizontal bouncing. On top of everything, there are FOUR distinct gameplay variants. The first is your standard shoot-out, the winner being the first player to take down the other one seven times. The second variation, "six shooter", only gives you six shots before you have to pick up some more ammo. The "escape" variation lets the left player shoot at a defenseless right player, who tries to survive until the counter expires. Finally, a "score" variation lets players earn points by shooting obstacles. I can't say enough good things about Gunfight. I can only hope to see more new quality games like this one for the 2600.
1 or 2 players

Marble Craze (Xype 2002) A-
This new 2600 title offers some refreshingly original gameplay and unique control. It's based upon the old board game where you tilt a board on two axis in order to guide a marble through a maze. Marble Craze requires you to use two paddle controllers at the same time, and that's a first. The controls feel pretty comfortable once you get the hang of them, and bars on the edge of the screen help keep you orientated. In each of the 18 stages, you guide a large white ball around contiguous screens, trying to reach the end of the maze before timer runs out. The first few mazes have walls, but the advanced stages require a great deal of skill. Scattered "power bars" provide bonuses such as extra time or bonus points. Marble Craze delivers some fine split-screen competitive action, but what's really charming about Marble Craze is how it pays constant homage to classic Atari games. Some mazes are taken from old Atari games (the blue maze in Adventure for example), and you'll even find mazes in the shape of classic Atari characters (Pac-Man, Space Invader, ET). My only complaint is that it can be hard to determine which direction you need to go. But overall, this is some inspired stuff that's both fun and addicting. There's a nice title screen also. Xype continues its winning streak.
1 or 2 players

Dark Mage (Greg Troutman 1997) C+

What's this - a text adventure on the 2600?! Okay, now we're talking some hardcore old-school gaming!! It's been quite a while since I've played one of these, and Dark Mage brought back a lot of fond memories. Text adventures were originally made famous by a little company called Infocom in the early 80s, with their classic home computer titles like Zork, Enchanter, and Hitchhikers Guides to the Galaxy. Dark Mage is primitive but definitely playable. The text is large, minimal, and easy-to-read despite the ugly yellow-on-red color scheme. Well-designed controls allow you to move in four directions, talk, take, give, use items, and check your inventory. Once you get a feel for it, you can quickly move from one area to another. Like all text adventures, the main idea is to collect items and use them to unlock new parts of the game. There's a lot of trial and error involved, so expect to see this message a lot: "You can't do that here". It doesn't help that some of the puzzles don't make a lot of sense (use a small dog to subdue an ogre? huh?) You'll also soon realize that you need to map out your progress on paper to keep from getting lost. Despite its flaws, I found myself drawn into this little adventure. Just the fact that it runs on the 2600 has got to be worth something.
1 player

Want to read more? Check out www.videogamecritic.net

Bad Video Game Jokes

What better way to celebrate the last issue of Retrogaming Times than with some really bad jokes. These were jokes that I came up with while walking my dog. I just took names of popular video games and came up with bad puns on them. I would say that I hope you enjoy them, but I know better.

Joke #1
What is a slang name for security at a nude beach?

Answer - Moon Patrol

Joke #2
What comes after Map O?

Answer - Mappy

Joke #3
What do you call a part time mosquito?

Answer - A Tempest (get it Temp Pest as is temporary pest, I know it is bad)

Joke #4
What did they call the magician who got drafted?

Answer- The Wizard of Wor

Joke #5
How would you get money out of a river bank?

Answer - With a River Raid

Sites of the Month

This is the last spotlight on deserving sites. There are literally thousands of classic video game sites on the net, a small cry from a hundred or so that were there when I first opened this site back in February 1997. But like everything else on the internet, there are more everyday with some specializing in one system or even one game and others that cover everything. So let us look at a handful of sites and enjoy them. After this, you are on your own to find the sites. Google on!

Champ Games Fan Site

Back in 1996 and 1997 in the early days of MAME, there was a company that did something great! They recreated original arcade games and then did enhanced versions and put them together on one disc and sold them online. For a few years, they offered some truly great games from Champ Kong (Donkey Kong) to Centipedem (you should be able to guess this one). They did eight games in all and most featured both versions, original and enhanced. I remember buying a few and still have the originals. But in 1998, they went out of business right before they were to release enhanced versions of Frogger and Burgertime (I was anxiously awaiting Burgertime). While I do not know the reasons why they went out of business, lawsuits may have been a factor. Nintendo is notorious for defending their properties and Donkey Kong is one of their most cherished properties. But now this site offers downloads of all the games and while they are DOS games, I could get them to work on my Windows XP machine.

So head over and grab these games before they disappear again. And if you want to read the first time I spoke of these, go all the way back to issue #2 to read about my review of ChampKong. Here is the link to the website:

http://www.champ-em.com/index.htm

L.A.P.P.
If you go on my website you will see that I have a section for arcade ports. I list all the home versions of classic (and some not so classic) arcade games. While my list is pretty extensive, someone pointed out what may be an even bigger list. It would be the L.A.P.P. which stands for List of Arcade and Pinball Ports. So if you want to see even more arcade games that had home conversions, run over and check this site out:

http://www.skunkworx.org/lapp.stuff/index.html

FPGA
This stuff means absolutely nothing to me, but Jim Krych sent this link along, so I will pass it on. It has something to do with putting games on chips and using them. How? Where? Why? It is too technical for me, but if you like it technical, this site should do the trick.

http://www.fpgaarcade.com/

Atari 2600 on a Chip
This is an intriguing concept, but as with the previous website, it gets pretty technical. Yes, it is another link from Jim Krych, but when a guy can create his own arcade joystick, you have to believe he understands all the stuff they are talking about on this page. For me, I just want to play games. I leave all the technical stuff to Jim. But if you want to keep abreast on the development of the Atari 2600 on a chip, this site is for you.

http://www.mindspring.com/~2600onachip/index.html

What Now?

I know that many of you are regular readers of Retrogaming Times. And many of you want to know where to go now for your fix of classic game reading? Well, I have some suggestions for you. All of them have been mentioned in past issues, but with the end here, it is a good time to point them out once again.

Classic Gamer
What once was a great print magazine is now a great free downloadable magazine. It features all the stuff you loved in the paper edition only this time it is free! So now you can hop over and read it! I am sure that I will submit a few articles down the road (I wrote for it during its original run).

http://www.classicgamer.com/

The Atari Times
Another great online source for Atari information. And at the end of the year, they release

a compendium which has received rave reviews. So check out the site and enjoy some great articles.

http://www.ataritimes.com/index.html

My Atari
Here is another great online newsletter with the focus on Atari, hence the name. As of writing, there has been 42 issues, so it is not some new magazine. This one does also cover some of the Atari computer as well as the newer systems like the Jaguar and Lynx.

http://www.myatari.net/

2600 Connection
Russ Perry's great newsletter that is about the Atari 2600 (not sure why I keep pointing this stuff out when you can easily figure it out from the title). It is actually a print newsletter, but they also offer alot of articles online for you to read. It is currently on issue #75.

http://2600connection.atari.org/

Cyberroach
While there is only a few issues per year, they are all very good issues. This newsletter has been out since 1999 and is on issue #16. Most of the back issues are available to read.

http://www.cyberroach.com/default.htm

Armchair Arcade
Only on its second issue and it is already impressive. This one covers all the systems and is very well done.

http://www.armchairarcade.com/

So as you can see, there is plenty of classic game newsletters online for you to read. Things sure have changed since Retrogaming Times first came out and there were no online newsletters (only offline). I like to think that I helped in a small way to bring about this major growth in online newsletters and feel comfortable knowing that my readers will not be without options.

When Nostalgic Becomes Pathetic: Fondly Looking Back On What I Have Looked Back Fondly On

by William Cassidy

So, Retrogaming Times is ceasing its illustrious run. End of an era. Game over, man; game over. And, in the parlance of the newsletter's subject, "Congraturation, this story is happy end." This kind of thing seems to have happened a lot in the classic gaming hobby lately. Many fan publications are struggling or ceasing altogether, and I've noticed several long-time collectors selling off their collections in part or entirely, citing lack of time, money, or too much "maturity," whatever that is.

Ends always cause me to look back on beginnings, and lately I've been reminiscing about the days when I first started collecting classic video games, about nine years ago. Ahh, the heady days of the mid-1990s, when the N64 was the Next Big Thing, when the melodius sounds of Hootie and the Blowfish filled the air, when moviegoers were treated to such cinematic classics as Kevin Costner's *Waterworld* and *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers: The Movie*. Classic games could be found seemingly everywhere; I picked up good stuff at least once a month, and eBay hadn't yet jacked up demand for everybody's worthless crap. That's when men were men, dammit! Yep, I remember that fabulous time

fondly, when I first started getting back into the games of my youth. And that's when it hit me: I have become nostalgic *for a time when I was nostalgic*.

I panicked. Am I caught in a horrible cycle? Is my life doomed to become a Möbius strip of recursive nostalgia, where I'm so mired in the past I forget there's a present? Will it grow so bad that I won't be able to finish this article because I'll be too busy reminiscing about the first paragraph? And MAN, was that a good paragraph! I particularly liked the "Congraturation" remark. I really stuck it to the translators! BA-ZING!

So, where was I? Oh, yeah... worry.

I was worried. I started wondering if my retrogaming obsession was really a good thing. After nine years of collecting, I have tons of classic games, but not very many modern ones. I started asking questions. Have I been missing out? Have I started idolizing old games simply because they're old? Did I leave the oven on? Which is a better investment -- high-yield stocks or low-risk mutual funds? I had a lot on my mind.

But then I realized that none of this mattered. OK, I'm preoccupied with old games, but so what? I've never been an "early adopter," so I wouldn't have many modern games in any case. And tons of games in my collection were plenty modern (or not yet released) when I started collecting. Most of my collection was "new to me" when I acquired it anyway, so I've enjoyed far more than I may have missed out on. And with games by Froggo in my collection, I'm not likely to start idolizing ALL old games any time soon. I hadn't left the oven on. A well-balanced portfolio is the surest way to financial security. My mind was at ease.

So nostalgia has its place. It can get out of hand, but there's nothing wrong with remembering your past fondly. After all, as you grow older, you'll only acquire more and more of it. Treat those memories well!

As the final issue of Retrogaming Times comes to a close, I'd like to take this opportunity to wish all its readers the best possible future. Just think of it as a rosy past that hasn't happened yet.

"Ask the Champ" Interview with Todd Rogers

By Alan Hewston

In a couple of my articles I've mentioned a famous video game player Todd "Mr. Activision" Rogers. Todd and I have exchanged emails/calls several times and he has been willing to do an interview with me for a while. Considering how many times he's been interviewed by others, I doubted that I could ask better questions, but Todd assured me that our Retrogaming Times readers would enjoy my questions to the champ. IMHO, he's one of, if not the greatest video game player of all time, with numerous world records, marathon games and even some high scores that have led to debates by our current retrogaming community. You have probably already heard of Todd and/or his records, but if not, then check out this site dedicated to Todd & some of his records.

http://www.beatthechamp.com/

As the adage goes, no matter how good you are, there is always someone better out there. Todd has been and still is that someone who is usually better than the rest of us. So let's "Ask the Champ" some questions that may help all of us to score higher.

RT: We appreciate your efforts to keep track of and document your scores, especially to dig up some from 20+ years ago. Even better, it is great to see such a valuable resource like yourself giving back to the community – ie your efforts as a referee at www.TwinGalaxies.com Tell us about TG and what you do for them?

TR: Certainly, I would love to give back to the gaming community with all my expertise to pass on my gaming knowledge to other inspired video gamers. I think that is the least an accomplished gamer like myself should be doing. As for my duties with Twin Galaxies I usually participate as a referee in verifying scores at live events to_ make sure that the players abide by all of the TG rules and settings. I also am the chief referee for all the Atari platforms and also the Game Cube for gaming submissions.

Todd promotes and is a referee for Twin Galaxies.

RT: Efforts like Twin Galaxies are great because no matter how old you are, or from what era you began playing video games, you can see what is a good or great score for a given game/setting, and then compete by submitting your scores on their site. This is true even for games/versions where there are no current high scores – as TG will verify your score and add it to their site. Do you continue to take on new challenges and play new games, different platforms, variations or settings that you have never tried?

TR: Why yes this is a good way to broaden ones gaming skills by not stagnating yourself to one specific game type. Yes there are gamers out there that specialize in one field or type of video game but not me, I love the challenge of something new.

RT: Even though we realize that we'll never be the best, many retro gamers still have that urge to compete. We know that we can get better with practice. What do you suggest as some of the best tips on improving one's game?

1) Learn from one's own mistakes – do not keep playing the same way, or dying the same way.

2) Use a VCR to record your games, and go back and analyze mistakes, learn the game's nuances better.
3) Don't play to long on any setting – keep fresh.

4) Don't play a game too long where your score is not improving. Try some another day with a fresh approach, or maybe even wait a long time.

5) Be focused, never try a serious game with possible distractions.

6) Get someone else watch you and tell you what else you may be missing.

7) Play with someone else and work together to get better.

8) Practice games at harder settings.
9) Be very creative, original, out of the box, and try different approaches.

10) Read those tips and tricks and hints on the internet or in old magazines.

RT: Playing a game programmed with a pause or on a system with a built-in pause can make a world of difference, and often makes playing home versions much more fun, and more worth my time. In this case, no one is cheating. But there are many home games, and of course, all arcade games where there is no break in the action, no normal means to pause. For recording high scores what do you feel about using an alternative means to pause or suspend a game? Should it be allowed at all? Considered, but given an asterisk?

TR: Hmmmm let me just say I'm a prodigy of the old school gaming, NO pause's, NO freeze frames. I would gather to say that if you are trying to better your game to see what next for the next time you play a regular game sure why not. But for a recognized score or

a submitted score I wouldn't even acknowledge it myself of you are going to pause a game to enhance your score or time totals. We are talking about OLD school games but for these new RPG's I guess to finish you probably would have to have some kind of breaks or pause's in between but then again you are talking to a gamer who's marathoned over 60+ games and one game in particular totaling over 80+hrs straight.

RT: Similar question that I have a strong opinion on. Do you feel that records need to distinguish (or be split into 2 categories) between if a real console/system were used or an emulator - especially since emulators can more easily be tampered with, or the settings may not be known by the player?

TR: MOST definitely there should be two separate categories. I've been in some pretty heated debates with other prominent TG ref's over this sort of venue even though the emulators are socially accepted in the gaming community I DON'T readily recognize them just for the simple fact that the chances of cheating are greatly enhanced by the EMU's capabilities.

RT: You have excelled at the home gaming consoles from the classics to the newer systems and many of the best gamers on these platforms are well aware of who you are . Do you think that the online gaming community will welcome a champion gamer like yourself the world of online competition? Are there any gamers who you'll look forward to competing against, or competing with?

TR: Well I'm sure that the online gaming community is in a league of their own but I would never say "No" to an open challenge from players like John "Fatality" Wendel or any other online gamers for that matter. It's the challenge that keeps us players coming back to strive for the best in ones self. I don't think that they would care too much about who I am unless they loose time after time to me, and then the light bulb will go on. I am already participating in online games like "Twisted Metal Black" and I enjoy the realism of how games have evolved and to think how many people can play at the same time from around the globe. It's not just your living room with your neighbors anymore.

RT: You have obviously excelled at the shortest of games, like 2600 "Dragster" to the longest running marathon type games 2600 "Journey Escape". What tips can you give a game player for attempting a marathon game? Consider these:

RT: Health - make sure that you are up to it and not harming your health.

TR: Very true if you have heart troubles you should never try a marathon . . . It's just simply not worth it.

Heart troubles. Here's Todd with Barbie Benton - she can really make one's heart pound.

RT: Age – it is much easier when you are young and healthy especially for a marathon game.

TR: Age definitely has its effects on your health, but as for marathon games, I don't see there being any troubles (for me) as of yet.

RT: Duration - know how long you want to play and have a good reason to play for that long.

TR: Exactly what are your efforts going to be worth Personal or Prestige.

RT: Functional system, controllers, power supply, recording system.

TR: YES! You must have good hardware and record your game if you want to be recognized for its authenticity.

RT: Know your game – read the rulebook, is there a pause, know when you can take a break in a game, and if there is no break then what will you do about it.

TR: Well from personal experience I haven't had to go to the potty even with a 60hour game. But if the player is not so fortunate then they should make sure they have accommodations that wouldn't impede the game at hand if there is no pause.

RT: That is amazing! How about location - Have you ever played marathon games while at a location where you really could eat, drink and relieve your self and thus do everything in a normal day, except of course to sleep while playing?

TR: Yes I have been in situations like that but oddly enough the longest I've played a MARATHON game away from home like in the Arcade has been 40 hours. I would not suggest playing a marathon at a friend's house due to the lack of reliability.

RT: Having a good environment – such as good lighting, no noise, no distractions,

atmosphere, temperature, liquids to drink, fruit etc?

TR: That is the ideal environment but, a true Video Game Athlete should be able to play under ANY kinds of situations. The catering of food, liquids and temperature is always welcome to the gamer for making his/her game better. But lets not get to cozy because the minute you loose the ZONE is when you get tired and loose your game.

RT: Do you still enjoy playing games on the old platforms as much as you used to, perhaps even more so, since you, like everyone else has a job, and a life to live. With less free time, you probably really welcome the VG as a means to unwind. Which system(s)/platform(s) are your favorite(s)?

TR: Well that is quite easy I still play the old Atari 2600. It's my favorite not only because that's where I got my stardom from but the games were more of an interest to me. Though the games of today are great in graphics, and offer their own kind of enjoyment, I do not enjoy them quite as much.

RT: How do you pick what game to play next? Do you typically play games that you have not yet played - to establish your first high score. Play non-marathon type games where you are still getting better? Games which others are currently playing – ie submitting scores - and you join in the challenge? Or just pretty much random?

TR: Well I try to pick games that interest me most at first. Then I see which games I'm lacking so I can take up their volume too. You can NEVER have too many high scores and you can never play enough systems. I think I currently have high scores on 20+ platforms now so keep them systems and games coming.

RT: Even if I were really good at a given game, I still wouldn't have enough time in my life to play many if any marathon games. But, I'd like to know at what point in a given game that it hits the "marathon" point. When does it reach its peak difficulty? It would seem to me that this may be the final frontier of classic _video game history. To archive all the classics, so that we can know if we'd need to play for 10 minutes, 1 hour, or 1 day to get there. I think that this may be a fairly attainable goal, since today we can so easily hack or dissect the code and read it, or modify it to play in various ways, or at various settings. Maybe someone can start to document this – perhaps Twin Galaxies. OK, I need to post a question . . . Do you think that this may be an attainable goal or see something like this happening? Documenting the round, level, duration in a game where it maxes out?

TR: Wow that's a loaded question. Well I think that the average player has goals of his/her own and at some point they want to make their gaming goals a reality. The key to that is determination and never give up. But some gamers however have an inherent ability to play better then some other gamers no matter how hard they try. It's like school. Some students learn more rapidly than others at a specific course. I tend to lean more toward the obsessive side to where if I set my mind to something I NEVER give up till it's achieved. The bulk of my gaming passion comes from the challenge that I couldn't accept the idea of a computer beating me. So inadvertently I played these games unaware that I made scores so high that other players couldn't match and they would get outraged at times or just plain have jealousy toward me. So some times it can have adverse effects by being so determined at the game that you want to master. On a lighter note I already have compiled a video tape of my high scores and I call it "The BEST of Todd Rogers". It will have 8 hours worth of classic games and high scores and how to achieve them. This has been in the works since I've been back in the gaming industry and maybe it will fill in some of those questions that you just asked. Players of all sorts may find it to be the holy grail to many of their questions once it is released.

RT: What is your preferred joystick (brand) or type of controller for various systems (for

those systems where you actually have a choice)?

TR: I am traditional I prefer the original Atari joystick for many of the classic games. But I have tried others like the EPYX stick and i like that one but I hated the WICO-SICKO sticks as I so call them.

RT: What are your maximum durations of games played for various systems (arcade & home)?

TR: The longest duration on the home platform is 86 hours on “Journey Escape” on the Atari 2600 and Arcade platform is_ just over 40 hours on “Gyruss” Marathon settings. I have also compiled a list of how many games that I’ve marathoned. It is hovering around 64 and this is for about 15 different systems.

RT: Do you enjoy playing 2 player co-op/simultaneous games, or pretty much solo only?

TR: Well pretty much solo games. Other than that, I typically only enjoy 2 player competitive games where you fight each other to test your gaming skills.

RT: What are some of your favorite 2 players co-op games (perhaps 2 player Asteroids, Mario Bros. or Gauntlet)? And what are your favorite competitive, head-to-head games (perhaps Archon, Pitstop II, or more or less Fighting Games) ?

TR: Since I usually don't favor the 2 player co-op games I will probably just say Mario Bros. But as for fighting games - Street Fighter. There was an instance in the Mall of America show of 2002 in which a player beat 30+ players in a row at “Street Fighter” but since I was representing Twin Galaxies as a ref. The sponsors of that contest didn't really want me to challenge that good gamer so it never happened. I would like to have thought that he would have challenged me after the show just for giggles but he did not. On the other hand Billy Mitchell and myself decided to play an enhanced version of “Pac-Man” in where we put a piece of card board in front of the whole screen covering it. We then played “Pac-Man” strictly by memory and we called it BLIND “Pac-Man” our final scores needless to say were not what we would normally get on “Pac-Man” what a classic showdown.

RT: Have you ever had a power surge or blackout wipe out a game or entire system? Has a system or power supply ever died otherwise during play? Did you lose any good scores then? Do you now employ any prevention or backups today – such as an uninterruptable power supply?

TR: OH HELL YES I’ve blown out Four Atari 2600's, Two Atari 5200's, One Colecovision, and One Intellivision. There was a time in particular that I was playing “Worm Whomper” on the Intellivision and after many hours of game play I decided to take a photo of my score. It was over 20 Million and just after I took the photo one of my gaming buddies accidentally hit the power switch and bumped the intellivision and the game was LOST. I had to replay the game to eventually max it out at 99 million. It was the first game that I marathoned for 72+ hours and the remainder of the 8 days to finally max the score at 99 million. Yes now days I employ a Minute Man charger that enables me to play games like Brien Kings "Frostbite Freddie" on a PC without the worry of a loss of a game if there is a power failure and anyone knows living in Florida, the lightning capital of the world, how energy surges can be and with games that you can marathon or better yet games you just love to play with out interruption.

Brien Kings "Frostbite Freddie" see: www.arcaderestoration.com

RT: Similarly, how many joysticks or controllers have you broken in your time? Were you able to quickly swap in fresh ones to save a long running, or marathon games?

TR: I have broken over 100 joysticks / controllers since 1977 Atari's Coleco's, Intellivision's . . . yeah I put them all to the test like for instance I was promoting a joystick from a company called SUNCOM and they boasted the unbreakable stick I think it was the Tac-2 well I played Decathlon using this joystick and as we all know Decathlon is the joystick tester or killer none the less the joystick wasn't "Todd-proof" and I broke it. Have I ever broken a joystick while playing a marathon game? I don't remember so at least nothing really important comes to mind.

RT: One final series of questions. A player needs to be good or excellent in several different ways, or they can never be one of the best at a game. On some games you may need to excel in just about every skill, and certainly you have. Please comment on these skills, and tell us how good you are at each of them?

TR: Shoot. I'll give it a whirl.

RT: Memory – knowing which pattern or path when there is no pause or chance to use a visual aid.

TR: Very good. This is how you hone your gaming prowess and for me it was easy since pattern-like games are simple for me.

RT: Sensory / awareness – collecting and processing ear and eye information.

TR: Excellent. I've always excelled at reflexes. My father would always tell me to stop that thumping as my legs would always bounce up and down due to hyper-activity.

RT: Coordination – every move you make is correct and you execute control exactly as you desired.

TR: Very good. This is where you incorporate the memory part. Memory works hand in hand with the coordination of what's next in some games.

RT: A 6th sense, guessing or luck – making a choice and it usually turns out to the right one.

TR: GOOD yes I've always had an ability to pick up on the manner of things and reactions so thus predictions and patterns are easy.

RT: Experience – use your experiences to help you avoid repeating exact or similar mistakes, or employ tricks, patterns, maneuvers, or caution.

TR: VERY GOOD. ALWAYS and I repeat ALWAYS look at how you are playing a game and if the strategy doesn't work then why try to die again - over and over. The same logic applies to real life so if you put your hand on the stove when its hot and you get burnt you now know its hot and not to do it again . The next attempt you should then try putting your hand on the hot stove after you pour ice water on it . . . you won't get burnt as bad if any at all it's just a simple over come method. It may not be normal but it works.

RT: Intelligence / creativity – learning as you go and making sound decisions or finding creative solutions based upon your intelligence.

TR: Good. This is where you again apply the concept of learning the game which you are playing. The master gamers will always seek the best possible way to execute a move with the least possibility of death. Self preservation and the willingness to see to it that they won't make hasty decisions when any situation arises.

RT: Endurance – Need we ask you? – playing for a long time without diminishing skills.

TR: VERY GOOD. Well since I've marathoned more games than most gamers I would be confident to say you need to learn how far your body will go and ask yourself why you are doing what you are doing and for what cause? Some games are simply just not worth the headache (duration required) to play a marathon and still only end up in second or third place.

RT: Todd. We really appreciate your patience and enthusiasm for this interview. These were not your ordinary questions, but hopefully those that our readers enjoyed hearing about. Thank you much for your time and we are all looking forward to your video. Please let us know on your site when "The BEST of Todd Rogers" becomes available.

TR: Well I thank you Alan and the RetroGaming Times Online magazine for taking the time and to have me being an included part of this, the possible final issue. I have done numerous interviews over the past 22 years Live, Newsprint, Magazines, TV ,Cable and I found this particular interview to be one of the best in my opinion. The questions were well thought and covered a vast array of game play with strategy's and I hope it will convey and pass on the very best of my video gaming knowledge to upcoming and more experienced gamers.

Todd Mr. Activision Rogers

TwinGalaxies Atari, Intellivision & Game Cube World Wide Referee

http://www.beatthechamp.com & http://www.twingalaxies.com

If you have any more question to "Ask the Champ". Todd can be reached at:
toddrogers64NOSSPAM@yahoo.com
Alan "Mr. Many Faces of" Hewston can be reached at:
hewston95NO@SPPAMMMstratos.net

Retrogaming Times Top 10 Videogames from 1981

by Alan Hewston

Here are the results of your votes for the best video games having their original version released in 1981. As usual, I got some help from the RT staff to narrow the list down to 40 titles – which is always difficult. I left off a few titles that folks wanted to see on the list. And here are some that didn't make our cut - Crush Crumble & Chomp, Lazarian, Pleiads, Video Hustler & Funky Fish.

With little time to ask you to vote, I still posted to the newsgroup, RGVC, and then emailed everyone who had voted in the past. We had 88 voters, a couple of the 1980 voters forgot to vote here I guess. Many thanks for all of your votes.

1981 brought on another close race, exciting to me, the vote tabulator, but not near the rush that 1980 had. "Donkey Kong" pulled it off with an astounding 82% of the voters selecting it. This broke the previous #1 percentage just earned by "Pac-Man" in 1980 (72%). And Galaga in 2nd place had 80% of the votes . . . Wow!

OK, so on with the winners.

Top 10 from1981
(# of votes) & Title
(72) Donkey Kong
(70) Galaga
(64) Frogger
(61) Ms Pac-Man
(50) Wizard of Wor
(46) Qix & Qix II
(35) Gorf
(34) Kaboom!
(33) Scramble
(31) Castle Wolfenstein

The next 5:
(30) Venture
(27) Vanguard
(24) Omega Race
(19) Stargate
(17) Ladybug

Here are the rest, since you did not get to see the ballot: (15) Bosconian, (15) Turbo, (12) Lock 'n Chase, (12) Super Cobra, (11) Mouse Trap, (10) Space Fury, (10) Armor Attack, (9) Space Dungeon, (8) Quest for the Rings, (8) Make Trax, (8) Solar Fox, (7) Kickman, (7) Temple of/Upper Reaches of Apshai, (6) Cosmic Avenger, (5) Jawbreaker, (5) Looping, (5) Pick Axe Pete, (4) Threshold, (4) Turtles, (3) Moon Shuttle, (3) Crossfire, (2) Alpine Ski, (2) Super Heli, (1) Space Fortress & (0) Armored Car. I voted for all ten of the 1980 winners! But 7 of my choices were in the bottom of the barrel here.

Part way through the survey, I was informed that I forgot the most popular original-concept Atari game ever - "Yar's Revenge". Rats! I mean Ray! This baby probably would have cracked the top 15, or maybe top 10. Now we'll never know.

1981 was a good year, but overall, 1982 appears to have been our voters favorite from 1980 through 1984. Voters had a hard time getting their lists down to 10, and the voters picked more titles (per voter) 9.61 than any other year – way to go 1982.

Here's how they ranked:
1)1982 9.61
2) 1983 9.36
3) 1981 9.09
4) 1980 8.87
5) 1984 8.48

Special Tribute
In place of a separate article, I'd like to pay a small tribute to the "Castle Wolfenstein" creator, and co-founder of Muse Software, Silas Warner, who passed away recently at the age of 54. Silas was a mentor and friend to many who worked with or under him, including "Space Taxi" creator John Kutcher. I was not able to do much research on short notice, and considering my plethora of projects this month, but he was credited with the first talking video game "Castle Wolfenstein. Here are some links to check out.

http://www.greggman.com/games/silas.htm
http://pwp.value.net/~penomee/silas.html

Alan Hewston can be contacted at hewston95NO@SPPAMstratos.net
This review written with "Do the Donkey Kong" playing over and over again in my head.
And click below to see the results from all the surveys from the years 1980-1984:
http://my.stratos.net/~hewston95/RT/RTSurveyResultsGameoftheYear.xls

No Quarter Given, None

Recieved

by Geoff Voigt

It's over.

RT is ending, and after some reflection and a few bulk buys of Mad Dog 20/20 I can say this: We won. In the end, we the cranky semi brain-addled nostalgic old farts of video gaming, have come out victorious in our quest for Classic Gaming's recognition as a watershed moment in technology, in art, and in history; in an attempt for it to be remembered. Think about it. What are many of the symbols, the terms, and culture used nowadays in popular culture? Where do they come from? A lot of them come from our days in a darkened room wiggling a controller around in front of a cathode-ray tube.

'Space Cadet', a term first used by a bouncing orange robot to talk smack at us in an attempt to get our quarters, has entered the English lexicon:

Space Cadet
n. Slang
One who shows difficulty in grasping reality or in responding appropriately to it; a spacy person: "the screwups and the space cadets in other words, the fringe element" (Linda Ellerbee).

(taken from dictionary.com)

Video games have become a major influence in the realm of contemporary art. I'm in the thick of it my own damn self, kids, please believe me. The now-finished art show 'Super-Flat!', dealing with current Japanese artists had several artworks involving videogames. Earlier this year there was the Art Exhibit, 'Bang the Machine: Computer Gaming Art and Artifacts' at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in Stanford University, showing nothing but video-game inspired art.

JakksPacific has the top-selling toy in America right now: those damned Atari and Namco TV joysticks that one can either flame for not getting the sound right on Dig-Dug, or applaud because they make Classic Games 'cool' again. The glass is half-full, kids, it's half-full.

Seeing as how this is the last chance I'll ever have to beat my chest on this virtual soapbox: let's leave nothing unsaid. The forum RT is leaving behind isn't empty: Classic Gamer Magazine has returned, so the monthly (Monthly? Did I get that right Cav?) fix of Classic ruminations is just moving, and with a familiar helmsman. I see no better heir to the white porclain throne Tom's levaing behind. take a seat, Cav.

RT is partially responsible for some of my favorite memories: CGE 2000 and 2001. Free Beer will go a long way towards currying favor. Remember that Kids. I sure as hell will.

It's time to take a page from Tom Z. here and move on. Classic Gaming is fully recognized as the start, the Big-Bang, of the cultural contribution the post-Baby-Boomer generation is making to the First-World dialogue. So as we all sit back tonight, in our own private wakes for a webzine that let us speak to our own, raise a glass in memory to the benefits of being cranky and not giving up.

I recommend some Prestone with a Geritol chaser.

(Geoff Voigt is currently crying himself to sleep. The Pansy. He's also graduating with a BA in Studio Art from CSU Los Angeles this June. All Emails from irascible38@coldmail.com [addy intentionally munged] will get a reply streaked with paint and coffee. This is his sollemn vow)

Commodore Sixty-Forum

by Alan Hewston

The X1541 Cable - is it worth buying one to play more games?

A 25th hour submission to RT #80, since Tom was not quite done. So bless Tom if he added this article for you to read.

I'm a firm believer that one should play the games on the original system. But you need the games on disk or cart. For quite a while the emulation scene ruled the day, as there were not a lot of other choices. Either you had the original system, controllers and the games, and all were functional, or you were stuck with emulation. Today, most systems and controllers are relatively cheap, and easier to acquire, but still not always the games. Thus, the X1541 cable and other such tools/devices will bring the games to you. There's only a token investment of money, and then of course your time – in proportion to how many games you want to acquire. Once you have everything in place, you can truly recapture those old memories, and also discover some new ones.

A few readers have asked me to cover the use of the X1541 cable, and other such hardware. I'd also like to tell about my experiences with the Atari 2600 Cuttle Cart, and the Atari 7800 Cuttle Cart II (coming soon), and the SIO2PC cable (got mine from AtariAge.com this Christmas) for the Atari 8 bit computer line. All of these products do have their own web sites with help files, and much better explanations than I can ever provide. I am just here to be that motivational voice telling you to go and DO IT! Their web sites have great explanations on the workings of their hardware and software (to work the file transfer) between your classic system/computer or disk drive and your modern day PC. Their FAQs will get you going, so start there. Then check out gaming sites that support emulation, since most of the same game files will be used. Finally, they may tell you how to make your own, or who to contact and of course where to send payment to buy one. I'll summarize a few links at the end.

Let us first start by reminding you that acquiring these games for free for emulation, or to play on your original system is probably NOT legal. If, however, you do currently own the original game on a floppy disk, cassette tape, cartridge or other original product, then you are supposedly allowed to have an archival copy. This archival copy would be especially useful to have if the old disks no longer work, or they cause undesirable effects, like knocking and banging on your disk drive. But you must own the original for this to be legal – otherwise you are a software pirate. There may be some loophole that you can download the games once and then play them for a trial basis, delete them right afterwards etc. Idunno.

OK, now onto what to do.

There are 2 choices here. 1) Download games from the internet to play on your own classic system. Or, 2) archive games that you have originals for, and send them over to your PC for permanent storage or safekeeping. Likewise, you can send them to the PC, then back again, and in some cases you may ultimately be able to make a backup copy. But most of these programs do not have copy protection or hacking capabilities, so you probably need to hack or break the games first, before transferring. Games being downloaded from the internet have already been broken. I'll only talk about the first choice, downloading them form the Internet.

You must first figure out what the game(s) you want to play and locate them. Go ahead and start that process now, as you never know when the files will be gone – like MAME files. Download those any time, or at least make sure that you can find enough of the ones that you want before purchasing the hardware cable. Know what the game is called, or what version(s) you want. When in doubt, you might as well download anything that seems like it is the right game and then proceed. I find it best to make a file folder for each game that you are looking for and use it to place the files you download there. You'll also use this same folder to store the unzipped files. That will keep everything organized, otherwise you

may end up mixing files up later. If you are only doing a few games, no big deal, but if a lot, then keep up with it. The game files are usually referred to as disk images, or ROM images. Some games will require several files, or an entire diskette, or more full of data.

You must acquire the correct X1541 cable – specifically made to work for your OS. There are only a few choices, but read up on it and still double check and ask the author/seller which is the right cable for you. They are more than happy to assist. I would recommend spending the extra few dollars to buy the longer length cable. It is not needed, but it will be too late later.

You also need to acquire and install the software to make the file transfers possible. You can do this is advance as well, but you will really only understand the process when you have the X1541 cable, a PC, the transfer program, a 1541 or similar disk drive, and the disk/game image. The default is the “Star Commander” which is what I used successfully. One trouble that I had was that I tried to use a 1541 II disk drive and had no luck. So plan to have a standard 1541 or be prepared for more trouble shooting.

You’ll need to learn how to manipulate the file systems on both your PC and the 1541 diskette via the Star Commander. Make sure that you know how this works before you really attempt to transfer the files. I’d suggest using a formatted disk with some files on it that are not needed any longer, or you have backed up. Just play with the file management system until you understand what things look like and how to rename, or delete files, and now how many blocks you have left on the disk etc. Oh yes, and also how to format disks. You really should just format them back on your C-64 system with a 1541.

The files that you will download will be zipped. Unzip those and store them in each game’s folder. Then you will use the .t64 or .d64 images to transfer to the 1541. The Star Commander will transfer them from the PC format (.d64 or .t64) into the regular 1541 format, such as a .prg

Keep track of what is on each destination disk. You’ll also need to learn about copying entire sets of files from the PC to the 1541 so that they are all done at once and not one file at a time. Do your disk management on the destination disk ahead of time. Try to keep only a few games per disk and never bother putting too many games together, certainly not mixing a couple games onto a very full diskette with a large number of files or levels on it. You no longer need to ration your diskettes – well maybe you do. I forgot to mention that you obviously need to acquire some cheap 5.25” floppy disks. Make sure that they are LOW density. A good place might be at work as people throw the old stuff away, or thrift stores, and of course ebay. If you get IBM high density disks they will never work on the 1541. Just toss them out.

After transferring the files to the 1541, you can then take them back to the C-64 setup and check them out to make sure that they work. Check them all one at a time, and probably keep a copy of all the zip files and stuff from the PC later as well. Just group them together and burn them on CD for safekeeping. I’m pretty sure that folks are still illegally selling CD’s like this on the net as well. If you got no errors along the way, but it does not work. Possibly start from scratch and try the entire process again. Rule number 1 is to use a different blank disk every time. And if you are into it, maybe just make two copies while you have the setup going in the first place. Then you’ll have an exact archival copy ready to go. Too bad I didn’t think of this myself, earlier.

OK, now if you still have no luck with the final product, then the most likely the disk/ROM image is bad or not compatible with your C64, or 1541. I did not see this occur much, but it probably did once – and I’ll never know why. Just give up and move on – there are plenty more games out there. Also always use an external fan to keep your 1541 drive cool. Even better, use a fan and then limit your transfer sessions to one hour at a time. Most games will take 3 minutes tops.

Here’s some more information and links.

Joe Forster is the author of the Star Commander and you should check out his site first.

http://sta.c64.org/sc.html

And of course, where to buy the X1541 and which one.

http://sta.c64.org/x1541shop.html

I got mine from the guy in Hungary who helps distribute them. He is trustworthy.

Oh yes, in most cases, you'll fit the X1541 cable onto your LPT parallel printer port, and then your usual serial port on the back of the 1541 drive.

For C-64 game information try.

Lemon 64 http://www.lemon64.com/

and for downloads Gamebase 64 http://www.gb64.com/

An example of a file is for Demon Attack. DEMONATT.T64

It will come in a zip file.

X1541 for Dummies and more help at: http://www.geocities.com/cdsixfour/x1541.htm

If you have any questions, I'd be happy to help, but I am not an expert on the hardware or the transfer software. I would be happy to help you jog your memory with what game is called what, or do you remember that game called . . . that looks like . . . Alan Hewston can be reached at hewston95NNOO@SPPAMstratos.net If you are looking for any games, see my stuff for trade sale at: http://my.stratos.net/~hewston95/VG/trade.doc

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