TOMORROW'S HEROES
RETROGAMING
TIMES
The Newsletter for the Retro Gamer in All of Us

August 1998

RETROTIMES #12

Introduction

Well, it has been one year! A full twelve months of newsletters for everyone to enjoy! I am happy with the progress that it has made. It went from a very small first issue, to the last issue that was over ten times the size of the original issue. Even better is that we have settled on some regular columns and most importantly, we have contributors! Now we have our work cut out as we try to keep improving. The one constant that will remain is the price. It started free and will remain this way. It is just my little contribution to the hobby I love so much and has been so good to me. Once again, if you enjoy an article by one of the contributors, please email and let me them know. We all like to hear from fellow gamers.

The Lowly Game System vs the Powerful Computer

-Back in 1984, I was leaving for college. I decided to go to the college of Steubenville, about three hours away from home. While I was leaving many of the luxuries behind like home cooked meals, my friends, etc.., one thing I didn't want to go without was my video games. I had one major problem, I had a Colecovision and no television. So I would have to depart and leave my beloved game system behind.

Well, I decided to make one last trip to Children's Palace to see what sales they had. While I wasn't going to be home until Thanksgiving, I figured I couldn't pass up a bargain. I really had my eye on Frogger II, due to the ton of commercials for it in the comic books. So I planned on buying it and playing it before I headed to college.

Upon my arrival at the toy store, I was in for a surprise. Since the video game crash was in full swing, they were liquidating many games and systems. As I looked around, I noticed a system that would solve my dilemma, the Vectrex! Sitting there with its own screen, it gave me the ability to play games and not be in need of a television. While I had looked at the Vectrex in the past, its high price always kept me from buying it. But now it was on sale! There stood a mountain of them, all with the low price of $50.00. I could afford $50.00, no problem! So I grabbed it and one of each game they had there (twelve different games). The only thing I didn't buy was the lightpen, since I wanted to play games, not make pictures. Who would have known?

At college, the Vectrex became a very popular machine. There were a constant stream of people stopping by to play it. Games of football and Berzerk were to be heard throughout the day. It helped to break the ice and I met many great people. But not everyone was fond of the Vectrex. A friend of mine, John, who lived down the hall had an Apple II and was quite proud of it. Like myself, he also enjoyed having people over to play. I remember how he boasted because he had more games and they were in color. But no matter how many games he had or how much better they looked, the Vectrex was always more popular. While I never polled people on why they preferred it, I think one of the reasons would be the lack of loading time. Just

plug the cart in and play! No swapping disks, looking up files and loading the games. The wait between games on the Apple seemed like an eternity next to the Vectrex. So this was one time where the lowly game machine beat out the mighty computer.

Later I lent the Vectrex to a relative for his time in college. But instead of returning it to its rightful owner when he was done, he gave it away. I was then forced to buy my Vectrex back. To add insult to injury, the machine was broken, but I still had the games and the memories.

The Legality of MAME

In a past issue of Next Generation, they were talking about the legality of emulators. They came to the conclusion that the use of MAME was illegal and while the damage done may be minimal, it still did affect game companies and the people who created the games. This made me stop and ponder on it.

I have always been a big proponent of MAME and sing its praises. But, I can see their point. The ability to play games for free, instead of having to pay for them, does limit the revenue a company that holds the rights can make. It also makes companies rethink the release of classic game compilations as part of their audience is gone. Classic games have a more limited market than many of the other genres and having to start off handicapped isn't very beneficial.

While there is some legal aspects to MAME, there are also benefits that MAME has provided to the game industry. First and foremost, MAME has proven that there is a large market of people who want to play these games. Not just the handful of popular games that have been released on compilations, but the not so popular games that would be completely forgotten if not for MAME. Out of the 600+ games that are emulated on MAME, maybe a 100 will ever be seen on emulators. The rest would only be available for play if you could find the arcade machine somewhere.

Another thing MAME does is force the people making these compilations to give you more. Getting only six or seven games on a CD is a crime. The amount of space wasted on the CD is ridiculous. Now they are filling that with interviews, info about the games and more. This will encourage the die hard gamers to buy the compilation, even though they have MAME. They will want to get all the extras. This helps to give the consumer more for his money. The Williams arcade classics are fine examples of a CD with some extras.

Another benefit of MAME is that it builds interest in classic games that are being redone. Games like the new Frogger and the upcoming 3-D Pacman are getting a boost from the emulators as it is renewing the spark in old time gamers and introducing new gamers to these games. While most kids know of Pacman or Space Invaders, how many actually had the chance to play the games? Fewer and fewer arcades around the country are keeping any old arcade machines and hundreds, if not thousands are being thrown out. Soon many games will become extinct. Emulation allows these games to live on forever. While emulators are not the same as the real arcade machine, how many of us will ever again get to play games like Wacko or Wild Western again in their natural forms (gee I'm beginning to sound like National Geographic or something)? Plus, MAME allowed us a chance to play games that we never had exposure to. No matter how great of arcades you had near you when you were growing up, there is no way that you were exposed to all the games on MAME. Games like Mr. Do's Wild Ride and Time Pilot 1984 were completely unknown to me. What do you think the chances of them being emulated anytime soon?

in conclusion, I feel that while there are some legal issues with MAME, I feel it also has benefits that also cannot be overlooked. Maybe there is a way to resolve this to

benefit everyone. One proposition I thought of would be a small fee for ROMS. If you put a download fee that was minimal, like a buck or less on a ROM, then they could make some money and divvy it up between the different companies. I know that most people would frown on paying for something that they have been getting for free, but there could be benefits to it. Maybe more games like the unreleased version of Q*Bert (Harder, Faster, More Challenging Q*Bert, reviewed later this issue), may become available to the public. There may also be some encouragement to take the old games and revise them. Update graphics, sound and add more levels (like the now defunct Champ Games was doing). If there is some financial benefits, we could get some of these companies to rethink their investments in these old games. Just some food for thought.

Q*Bert Interview

With the release of Faster, Harder, More Challenging Q*Bert (abbreviated to FHMC Q*Bert for the interview), an unreleased sequel to one of my favorite games, I decided to do some tracking to find the programmer. After a little work, I was able to track down Warren Davis and get a little background into this game. I would like to thank Warren for taking time out of his busy schedule to do this interview. So here is interview, for all of you to enjoy.

Question #1-How many of the people from the original Q*Bert team were involved in FHMC Q*Bert?

Warren-The original Q*bert team consisted of myself as Game Designer and Programmer, Jeff Lee as Graphics Designer, and Dave Thiel as Sound Designer. No new sounds were added at all for FHMC Q*bert, and I believe Dave was onto other things by then, but Jeff designed an entirely new character, Q*bertha, and made a number of other art additions as well. So I guess the answer is myself and Jeff.

Question #2-Was the concept for FHMC Q*Bert yours (the Q*Bert team) or was it Gottliebs?

Warren- I don't know that the word "concept" even applies here. Gottlieb wanted some sort of sequel, but it was so soon after the original came out, that I thought of it more as an upgrade. I thought the original was made too easy (to pander to some focus group testing), and I thought if we came out with a faster, harder more challenging version a few months after people had time to master the original, we'd extend the life of the game. The changes we made were fairly minor from a programming point of view. As it turned out, we tested FHMC QB too early, and people weren't ready for it - they were still learning and enjoying the original - so Gottlieb shelved it.

Question #3-Did FHMC Q*Bert use the original code of Q*Bert and then enhanced or was it completely rewritten?

Warren-FHMC Q*bert was an extension of the original Q*bert code.

Question #4-Did you get ideas for any of the enhancements in the game from arcade gamers, either verbally or from observation, or were they all thought of by the team?

Warren-A combination. Some of the tweaking we did was directly related to watching the better players in the arcade. Some the of other things we did, like Q*bertha or the moving discs or the bonus round were things we either thought of ourselves or heard from other people.

Question #5-Was the name FHMC Q*Bert going to be the actual name or was it just a production name? If it was just a production name, was there any names being considered before it was cancelled?

Warren-The name was always FHMC Q*bert. I didn't want to do anything boring like Q*bert 2 or Super Q*bert, and the whole reason this came into being was because the people who were GOOD at Q*bert wanted something that was faster, harder and more challenging. That phrase was used so often in describing what we wanted to accomplish that I used it as the name. As a bit of background, the VP of Marketing, Howie Rubin, wanted the original Q*bert to actually be called *@!#*?! so you can see our management was open to the unconventional.

Question #6-When it was play tested, were there actual machines made for it or was the chip just put into an existing Q*Bert cabinet? If there were actual cabinets made, how many and are they still in working order?

Warren-I'm pretty sure we just put it into existing cabinets.

Question #7-Speaking for gamers everywhere, we are quite thankful you decided to release this lost game, but what made you decide to distribute it with MAME?

Warren-I've always had the ROMs for FHMC Q*bert running in my own Q*bert cabinet at home - it's always been my "Q*bert" of choice. When I first heard of MAME, I considered releasing the ROMs but was always too busy to really look into it. A few years ago, I hooked up with Steven Ryner who maintains a classic coin-op web site, and he seemed pretty excited that there was a "lost" Q*bert. After I left my job with Williams/Bally/Midwaywas, I started noticing a growing interest in classic arcade games and thought more that releasing FHMC QB would be interesting to people. Then Steve Ryner published an interview with me where I mentioned the existence of FHMC QB, and I started getting a lot of e-mail from people asking me to release the ROMs. The final
straw was that I just happened to be working with someone involved with the MAME project, Fred Soosookian, who asked me about it, and so I just turned over the ROM images to him and he saw that it got integrated. I'm sure it would've happened eventually if Fred hadn't come along, but that made it supremely easy for me.

Question #8-It is probably just wishful thinking, but are there any other unreleased versions of other games you programmed?

Warren-I was just watching some video I shot at the Gottlieb offices back in 1983 (I think) and a bunch of us were clowning around and playing prototypes of some games. There is some footage of a game I was working on which was abandoned. Even though management thought it had potential, I got bored with it and moved on to something else. I don't have any source code for it, but I'm tempted to try an recreate it just for fun (if I ever have any time!)

Question #9-If you approached (if you haven't already) to do a new game with Q*bert and given total freedom, what kind of game would you like to do?

Anything special you would want to have in the game?

Warren-I think I'll keep my ideas for a modern Q*bert to myself for now, just in case it ever happens.

*Here's a little bio... I got my start in the arcade game industry in 1981 at Gottlieb where I designed and programmed Q*bert and Us vs. Them (a laser disc game). I left the industry when Gottlieb closed its doors, and was hired by Williams a couple of years later. I worked on Joust 2 and Lotto Fun (a redemption game), and then helped develop a new system which would become Narc. I developed one of the first (if not the first) video digitizing systems used in coin-op games. I left Williams to become a consultant, and developed a game called Exterminator for Premier Technologies. I returned to Williams in 1991 where I worked on Terminator 2 and evolution X, and also upgraded their video digitizing system, paving the way for actors to be used in such games as Mortal Kombat, NBA Jam, and virtually all of Williams/Bally/Midway video arcade games of the early to mid 90's. I currently work for Disney Interactive.*

Warren can be reached via email at: warren_davis@studio.disney.com

MAME Reviews

I decided to review a game that was never available at the arcades and another that I didn't know existed in arcade form. Once again, MAME has offered me games that I would never have the opportunity to play without MAME. Is this a great country or what? So here are the reviews!

Faster, Harder, More Challenging Q*Bert

Is that a title or what? Something tells me they would have filled up that marquee! This is the unofficial sequel to Q*Bert. It was done after Q*Bert, but never officially released. But the programmer, generously gave the ROM to be included for MAME users. Another reason why MAME is awesome!

When you first play it, it will look and play like good old Q*Bert. Very little difference at first glance. But looks can be deceiving! Once you start playing this version of Q*Bert, you will see how it got its name. It really is a faster, harder and more challenging Q*Bert. If you thought you were a Q*Bert ace (myself included), then this game will humble you in a hurry.

The first change you will notice is that the platforms you jump on to avoid Coiley are now moving. No longer are they stationary targets. This alone changes the game and increases the challenge. But the good part is now you have an unlimited amount of platforms. After you use it, another one will take its place. Sorta addition by subtraction.

The next change you will notice is that there is no gradual learning curve here. Try a ninety degree turn of difficulty. The first screen is the same, but the second screen is like the first screen of round two in the old game. The third screen is like the first screen in round three and so on. As you can see, things get awfully tough in a hurry. No breezing through levels anymore, this is a serious challenge!

There are also other bonuses like a female Q*Bert and more! I would tell you about more of them, but I am having trouble getting there. This game has really taxed me and I am loving every minute of it!

Pitfall II

I knew this game made the rounds on the home consoles, I never knew it was released as an arcade game. While the gameplay is pretty much the same, it is more graphically pleasing to the eye. Pitfall Harry is now fleshed out more and the backgrounds are much nicer. There are many little features like trees with faces and multi levels of backgrounds. It really does look nice. The sound is decent with a lulling background song that doesn't exactly thrill you, but won't make you turn off the speakers either.

One thing you will notice is there are a ton of different challenges. There are the usual crocodile heads and swinging vines to contend with and some odder foes like exploding volcano and lightning bolts. One thing is for sure, you never know what awaits you on the next screen. While any of the tasks can be beaten, some take a little figuring to get past. Others need quick reflexes to get past. It is a nice blend and will keep you on your toes.

Overall, it is a very nice game. It is much like the original game for the consoles, with some new challenges and graphics. So, if you like Pitfall II on the home systems, then you will like the arcade version.

THE MANY FACES OF.....BURGERTIME

The specimen for this month's issue of Retro-Times is Burgertime. The title of the game says it all: It's time to make burgers, big burgers! And if you wait around too long, you're dead. This game has one of the most interesting cast of nasties I've ever seen in a classic game. Sausages (or are they hot Dogs?), eggs, and pickles, but they aren't too bright. You tiptoe onto a hamburger bun, they follow you on, you stepoff and "poof," you drop 'em for bonus points. Burgertime. can be found on three different classic systems:Atari 2600, Intellivision, and Colecovision.

Bronze Medal: Atari 2600

OK, this is just plain sad. I don't think this version is even worthy of a bronze medal! It's true that a good game doesn't need to have good graphics and sound, but you have to draw the line somewhere. Instead of pickles, sausages, and eggs, this version has a white flag, a brown flag, a yellow stick, and a sausage chasing you around...pretty scary huh? Play is very slow and I emphasize slow. This is one of the rarer M-network Atari 2600 games, I wonder why? :)

Silver Medal: Colecovision

This version is ALOT better than the previous version. Out of all three, the Colecovision version has the best graphics which is no surprise considering it's the latest system. But the play on this version is slightly flawed. Perhaps it's a problem with my system or cartridge, but regardless, what I play suffers from lag. You know, when you're playing a game at a constant speed, and all of a sudden it slows down for awhile (happens on the NES all the time), especially when there are alot of objects moving at one time. Doesn't that drive you crazy? It drives me insane. Don't get me wrong, this version is good, very good, but not the best.

Gold Medal: Intellivision

The Intellivision version is my favorite. There really aren't any flaws in this game. One could say the graphics are subpar, but they're ALOT better than the Atari 2600

version, and not too far behind the Colecovision. What I really like about this is how BIG everything is and how much SPACE there is. In the other versions, particularly the Colecovision, all action is crammed into 60% of the screen. Everything is so small that you die because you can't discern the direction of the sausage or can't tell how close the egg is to your behind. Anyway, try playing the other versions and then play this one and you'll see what I mean.
(Doug Saxon is an engineering student at the University of Cincinnati. He's mainly into 2600, 5200, Colecovision, and Intellivision. He's also a proud owner of a mint Chase the Chuckwagon cartridge which set him back $1. He can be reached via email at saxondj@email.uc.edu. Doug is also looking to complete the Atari 5200 set and needs these games. Bounty Bob, K-Razy Shootout, Quest for Quintana Roo, Star Wars:ROTJ-DSB, and Zenji. If you have any for sale or trade give him an e-mail.")

HOW DO YOU COLLECT?

There has been some talk on RGVC about how everyone collects there games. Do you buy from Ebay the newsgroup or hunt them down at the thrifts? I use all three methods but have the most fun looking thru boxes at flea markets and thrift stores. I suppose anyone could build a big collection quickly if you have the money but that`s not what I want out of the hobby.

Some people get the enjoyment out of buying a game and playing it, some the hunt and others having a rare Item. I love to play my games and like to brag a bit when I find a rarity but get alot of enjoyment out of the hunt. There`s nothing like looking in a box at a flea and seeing that game you have been looking for. Then hearing the vendor tell you "the old games are 50 cents". **YES!!** You try not to look too interested in them but are busting inside. You buy a good quantity or all of the games and quietly walk away, until you spot you buddy (who could care less about games) and run down yelling "**LOOK WHAT I FOUND**!!!". I also try and leave a few good ones for the next collector that comes along.

Some vendor are clueless about games and want to charge outrageous prices but most seem to be good to deal with. I have one vendor that always has alot of classic carts and have gotten to know him well. He know that I will be there everytime and has gotten to the point if he finds something that looks odd, he keeps it in the truck until I get there to go thru it. I have told him a few times that a certain game or system is worth more and gave him more for it. I always look forward to talking with him and is part of the hobby I enjoy, meeting new people (he plays the games too, but doesn't collect them much).

I buy from eBay when I look for something too long and have to have it now. I don`t trade alot because I can`t seem to part with any games. Thrifting seem to be the thing for me.
The great thing about our hobby is being able to collect something that you can do more than just look at, Meeting other that share in your love of games and knowing that there is always something else to find. I know there will be a day when I will no longer find anything I don`t have at the fleas but until then I will be there.

I`ll see you on the newsgroup until the next Retro Times, and want to thank Tom for letting me share my thoughts.
(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)

Too Soon Yesterday

I've been thinking about the classic gaming scene as it exists today and wondered how things will be viewed 10 or 15 years from now. Will players look back on these days of 32-bit, texture-mapped, anti-alaised, polygon-filled adventures with the same feelings of nostalgia that many have for the classics today ? Only time will tell us that. But let's look at some of the parallels between the classic and current era of video games.

Year 1998
In the old days…

There were three main players; Atari, Mattel (Intellivision) and Coleco. There were other, smaller players that tried to take a piece of the pie; Magnavox (Odyssey 2), Emerson (Arcadia) come to mind. Heck, Magnavox even started the home video game concept years earlier The Atari machine even let you download games through a subscription service called Game Line. Once a third player was announced, Mattel and Atari both scrambled to upgrade their systems to compete giving us among other things, the Atari 5200. Atari even created a third generation machine the Atari 7800. There were "experts" blaming video games for some anti-social behavior. Some games, like Halloween and the Texas Chainsaw Massacre, had people wondering if these things should be regulated or even banned. There was a unique, transportable machine called the Vectrex, that allowed you to play games in your home like nothing you ever played before. It failed miserably after releasing around 2 dozen games.

So what happened in the mid 80's ? Video game machines were challenged (in some ways) by low-cost computers. The Atari 800, Apple II and Commodore 64 machines became viable as both a work and play machines. Sure, they cost a little more the a dedicated video game machine, but there was productive things that you could do on them as well. Heck, schools used them. And the games that they offered were deeper in content and looked and played as good as anything on the dedicated video game machines. Some video game machines tried adding computer-like tools (like keyboards). Add to that an influx of crap software for the dedicated video game machines and… *Poof*

The Big Crash.

Year 2013
In the old days…

There were three main players; Sega, Nintendo and Sony (Playstation). There were other, smaller players that tried to take a piece of the pie; Atari (Jaguar), NEC (Turbografx) come to mind. Heck, Atari even started the home video game concept years earlier. The Sega machine even let you download games through a subscription service called the Sega Channel. Once a third player was announced, Nintendo and Sega both scrambled to upgrade their systems to compete giving us among other things, the Saturn. Sega even created a third generation machine the Dreamcast. There were "experts" blaming video games for some anti-social behavior. Some games, like Mortal Kombat and Grand Theft Auto, had people wondering if these things should be regulated or even banned. There was a unique, transportable machine called the Virtual Boy, that allowed you to play games in your home like nothing you ever played before. It failed miserably after releasing around 2 dozen games.

So what happened in the late 90's ? Video game machines were challenged (in some ways) by low-cost computers. The Windows-based and Mac machines

became viable as both a work and play machines. Sure, they cost a little more the a dedicated video game machine, but there was productive things that you could do on them as well. Heck, schools used them. And the games that they offered were deeper in content and looked and played as good as anything on the dedicated video game machines. Some video game machines tried adding computer-like tools (like modems). Add to that an influx of crap software for the dedicated video game machines and… *Poof*

The Big Crash ?

Before you label me as a prophet-of-doom, let me be the first to say that things are quite a bit different now then they were 15 years ago. The market is much broader than it was then. We have a generation that grew up playing games that is teaching their children to play games. The home video game machine is no longer just a kid's toy or a novelty. But the parallels that can be drawn are intriguing. No ?

But let me say this.

If "The Big Crash" was going to occur, it would have happened already. And what prevented it from happening this time was…

The Playstation

What brought the video game scene back from the dead in the mid 80's was Nintendo. The NES. It offered a wide variety of quality software. It was the thing to have. Not just a game, but a status symbol. It single-handily restarted the video game scene.

Imagine what the scene would be like now without the Playstation. The two survivors of the 16-bit wars each released a new machine. Both received an underwhelming reception. Rightly or wrongly, Sega has been trashed for giving players a rushed-to-market, hard-to-develop-for piece of hardware and Nintendo has been trashed for giving us mediocre software at a snail's pace. Would anybody disagree that the video game market would have dropped significantly in the last two years if not for Sony's little plaything ? How much more would the PCs have taken over ?

If the Playstation had been introduced two years later, would it have ignited the market like the NES did over 10 years ago ?

We'll never know.

But I think it already did.

(Fred Wagaman has been playing games for over 20 years and actively collecting them for almost 10. The 2100 + 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 2 year-old, button-loving son, Max. He can be mailed at fcw3@postoffice.ptd.net. He wants everyone to know that he loves his three Saturn machines and has found some of the N64 games to be the best among their genres. Fred wishes that no one's feelings will be hurt when this article is read, but he knows better.)

eBay Notes

Last month I spoke of how too many Intellivisions are on eBay and the amount of Vectrexes is increasing. This month, I will talk about a few systems and games that have seemed to dry up. These were items that were up fairly frequently in the past, but now they seem to only appear on rare occasions.

The first of these items is the Microvision. system. A few months ago, there were a handful of them up for auction and many games. But in the past few months, you rarely ever see this granddaddy of handhelds. I remember when I could always find at least a few games up at any given time. But now, you can search and you may find one or two, if you are lucky.

Another system that seems to have become scarce on eBay is the Bally Astrocade. Once again, it was never very plentiful on eBay, but this is getting scary. I know this is much rarer than the Atari or Intellivision, but not this rare. If this scarcity continues, you will be seeing prices rise for both systems.

Only a few months ago, eBay seemed to be flooded with the Mystique Atari adult games and the Starpath Superchargers and games. New in the box games for both were quite plentiful and while the prices remained high, they did start to dip some as one after another were auctioned off. But in the past few months, these once plentiful items have become quite scarce. Was it that a bunch were dumped on the market and now they have been absorbed? Is there another stash of them ready to pop out or have all the sources been tapped?

While some systems and games are getting tough to find, others aren't. One area that has surprised me is the amount of Coleco games that have been up for auction in recent months. Not only loose, but boxed games. Maybe it is because these boxed games are pulling in some big money. Anyone who is a long time collector knows that Coleco boxes are among the toughest to find, with possibly the Nintendo being very close behind (don't believe me, go to a flea market and count the loose Nintendo games as opposed to the boxed ones). I even saw a Ladybug, a common game, fetch $20.00 for a boxed version, about 5-7 times the price for a loose one. If this was the norm instead of the exception (and thankfully it isn't), then a boxed Q*Bert's Qubes would fetch between $250.00-$350.00, an amount usually reserved for Atari 2600 games only.

Tune in next month when I try to uncover more trends on the most hated, but most used auction site. Who knows what we will be talking about?

What's Happening in the Hobby?

This column, along with the eBay one were both very well received, so I will give them another month. If you like them, please let me know and I will continue them. If you don't like them, also let me know and I will look into replacement columns. Your feedback is read and taken to heart (thankfully most of it has been good).

Topic #1-Dangers of Game Collecting

I started a thread on a bizarre experience I encountered when I went to buy some carts. To my surprise, it really hit home as I received a ton of emails from people conveying some of their encounters with danger during classic game hunts. Some were quite funny and others were quite serious. They ranged from rip-off artists, people trying to push off stuff they had no clue of (like trying to tell someone those Intellivision carts will work with an Atari) to threats of bodily harm. As I read these, I have learned that many people take video games way too serious. Somewhere along the way, a select few people (they are the exception, not the norm) put too high a price on collecting these games and were willing to go to any length to finish that collection. People must remember that before you collected games, the air was breathable, the food tasted good and life was worth living. As much fun as these games may be, they are not necessary for survival. Mankind has gone thousands and thousands of years without video games and seemed to do alright. Just something to keep in mind when you are wrestling with someone over a rare Atari game at the flea market.

Topic #2-The Endless Debate

This is a thread that appears every few months, and when it does the battle lines are drawn. There seems to be two camps, one that wants classic games to be pre-crash games and always remain that way. The other camp wants to see games systems like Nintendo and Sega Master System eventually added. While there was some agreement that there are classic games (pre-crash and Atari 7800) and Neo-classic (Nintendo, SMS and Lynx).

While I can understand how some people want to keep them separate, I think it is inevitable that they will be lumped together someday. If you look at any other genre of entertainment, their definition of what a classic is in their field is constantly changed. In Rock n Roll music, there was a time when only 1950's and 1960's music was considered classic. Now many classic radio stations have gone on to include 1970's music. Same with television and movies. Shows like Happy Days and Taxi are now considered classic television. So why does this industry resist change so much? Is there still such a hatred for Nintendo because of how they spelled the end of Atari? Or is it that the game market that was so predominately American is now almost exclusively Japanese (Nintendo, Sega and Sony are all Japanese companies)? I am not sure, but there does seem to be a certain animosity towards the Nintendo.

Topic #3-The Emergence of the Dum Guys

A phrase I coined was the Dum Guys, an offshoot of the Sum Guys. For anyone who isn't a regular to the newsgroups, a Sum Guy or Sum Girl, is a person you encounter who also collects video games. They are usually someone you bump into at a flea market or thrift store. Some are nice people who you can exchange stories with and possibly trade games, others are rivals who seem to beat you to all the good carts. But lately, there is a new strain of Sum Guys, the much feared Dum Guys.

While Sum Guys are usually collectors too and have something to contribute to the market, Dum Guys are like a plague of locusts and strip an area bare. They go from one area to another and clean out all the games, commons to rare, with our guess, the intention of getting rich from them. I personally have seen the devastation as they swept through a local flea market and were buying with wild abandon. While they do clear an area of excess common carts, they also take away carts for potential newcomers and usually give vendors a reason to raise the price on carts. It doesn't take much for a flea market vendor to think classic carts are worth something and to begin to raise the prices.

So far, they have been sited in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, New York and a few other states. Some are actual sightings and others are just presumed invasions as common carts that had sat for ages are now disappearing with greater frequency. Is this just a recent rash or are the Dum Guys here to stay? I personally believe that more sightings will happen, especially next year after the two price guides are out. This just may be the final summer for finding classic games at great prices.

By the way, I originally called them Dum Guys because I watched them buy all the Nintendo carts at a single table for $3.00 each. While this may not sound like too much, there were three Super Mario/Duck Hunts and duplicates of many other very common games. I also watched them overpay for an Atari 2600 and Atari 5200, both with very common games.

4. Sniping on eBay

The argument over sniping on eBay reared its ugly head and there was alot of heated debating. While most people believed that sniping is a part of eBay and there is nothing wrong with it, others complained and some even offered solutions. For

those who don't know, sniping as it is called is the act of bidding at the last possible moment on an auction to win the item. While this may seem like normal procedure for some, there is usually a person who just lost out and is quite upset.

I personally think that sniping is alright as it is part of the game. Like it or not, it is done and will continue to be done. I don't personally snipe because I simply don't have the time to do it. I just bid on the item I want and put in the amount I am willing to pay and let it play out. If I lose, no big deal. As I said in the newsgroup, there is nothing on eBay that I cannot live without. It isn't like they are auctioning off kidneys and livers to the highest bidder. These are video games and most of us already have more than we will ever play in our lifetime.

5. World of Atari, battle of the cans and cannots

This was probably one of the biggest and meanest fights I have ever seen in the newsgroups. For anyone who hasn't heard, there is a show in Las Vegas called World of Atari. It will be probably the biggest show for classic games ever (and many not so classic games). Big-time vendors like Activision, Hasbro (the new owners of Atari) and others will be there. But the big thing that is getting people in a uproar is a rare game that will only be sold there and limited to 40 copies. I would name the game, but I am strongly opposed to market manipulative products like this. It is one thing to have a rare game due to poor sales or they just disappeared over the years, but to have a game start off rare with the intention of seeing the value get jacked up is just wrong. If anything will ruin this market, it is this. Forget about eBay and price guides, if this continues, you will see hundreds of money hungry people rushing to create these very limited games. Don't believe me? Look at the same stuff in sports cards. You have cards that are brand new and worth (at least in theory) more than cards of hall of famers like Mickey Mantle and Ted Williams. Know what, these cards don't maintain their value and go down as people get bored with them and move onto something else. Same will happen with these carts. The only limited cart that will maintain any value will be Cubicolor because of when it came out and because it was limited due to the fact he didn't think it would sell and not to make it a rare cart. It is always the first one to go up and the rest are cannon fodder.

OK, I am off the soap box, now time to get back to the subject. Anyway, there were many heated battles as people complained about the location and the cost to get there. The ones going (a few of them) argued that if you really wanted to go, you would find a way. This was debated with the fact that some people have limited funds and time and cannot afford to trek to this show. While I am not personally attending the show (time constraints), I do plan on attending next year if it is in the same place and around the same time.

Direction of Newsletter?

After last issue, I received alot of mail about the direction of the newsletter. Since I reviewed two Nintendo games in the last issue, alot of readers wanted to know if this was a one time thing or will I continue to cover the Nintendo? The letters seemed split with some people a bit upset as they thought this was a classic game newsletter only. The other half seemed pleased and wanted to see more!

Well, my intentions of this newsletter is to cover video games from all genres and eras. While the vast majority of coverage will still be pre-crash games, I will also cover some newer games. I am a big fan of the Nintendo and enjoy the system very much. So instead of shrinking the coverage of classic games, I will instead try to expand coverage to include the newer games. You will see this best implemented in "A Deeper Look..." where I will continue to look at two classic games and also will look at one or two newer games. Hope this makes both parties happy as I want people to enjoy the newsletter. Games are fun and this newsletter is all about the fun

of playing and collecting games.

A Deeper Look At....

Beginning this month, I will be adding a neo-classic review each month, along with the two classic game reviews you have grown accustomed to. This should satisfy everyone (I hope).

A Deeper Look at....Cabbage Patch Kids

This is one of those games that took me completely by surprise. A friend of mine, Jeff, told me about this game and I laughed. He tried to tell me how good the game is and I just couldn't believe it. I mean a game based on those chubby cheeked toys that were the original, overpriced, fad toy. So I finally decided to put aside my skepticism and give it a try. After a few games, I realized I was hooked! Yes, a former card carrying member of the He-Man Woman Hater's Club (of course I was like seven at the time), was playing and enjoying Cabbage Patch Kids. I had to stop and think about this for a moment. What was next, knitting doilies? Maybe crying during those awful movies on Lifetime (you know where former sitcom stars like Tracy Gold and Meredith Baxter's careers have gone to die).

Once I got over the initial fear, I decided that a REAL MAN could play Cabbage Patch Kids and still hold onto his masculinity. So I played on and found that it was essentially a souped up version of Pitfall. The two games have alot in common. Both are side scrollers and have you tackling numerous objects as you try to reach the end. But where Pitfall has a limited number of obstacles (logs, gators, pits, etc...), Cabbage Patch has at least twice as many. You will find a new obstacle almost every screen. This really challenges you to try and win the game, so you can see all the different screens.

The graphics are quite nice and you can easily tell that the lead character is a Cabbage Patch, complete with the sickenly cute looks and that trademark face. It takes alot not to try and kill the character. I mean with those big eyes and that eternal smile, you get guilty pleasure out of watching her drown or get hurt (when she falls, she has a little tantrum). But once you get that out of your system and get to the task at hand, you find it is a really good game!

A Deeper Look at.....Tapper

This is one of those games that I equally like for both the Coleco and the Atari 2600. The one I am looking at this month is the Atari 2600 version. It is one of a handful of

games that Sega made for the Atari, back when they were only a third party company.

Tapper remains true to the arcade and for the Atari, this was no small feat. You have the multiple bars you have to service, even if they are shorter than the other versions. The graphics are quite nice and you can easily identify everything. Your character is big and colorful. There are different bar patrons and quite a few on the screen at a time. There are multiple bars and you even get the end of the level animations.

The funnest part is the bonus stage. First off, you get to see Sega's greed as there is a huge Mountain Dew banner in the background. Wonder how much they got for that. But even funnier than that is the guy who sneaks around and shakes the cans looks alot like the Hamburglar from the McDonalds commercials. I laugh everytime I see this.

One of the only things missing is picking up the tips. I have yet to see any tips left and can only assume that this was left out of the game. That or my service is worse than I thought. You do get many nice little animations like the smashing glass and having them run you down the bar when you don't get them a drink fast enough. At least these guys don't send you flying down the bar, they actually just walk you real fast down it. A more humane way to get someone's attention.

Another example of how good a game can be for the Atari. While the Coleco is visually more appealing and has a few more extras, I feel this game is more challenging. I cannot play all night like I can with the Coleco version. In this way, it does capture the feel of the arcade better. If you don't mind paying a little (it goes for about $25.00 loose), this game is worth the investment. A very good game and one you will play again and again.

A Deeper Look At....Toobin

Another of those games that I cannot get to work on MAME, so I enjoy the Nintendo version. I tried to figure out my appeal to the game, as it isn't anything special. I don't know if it is the relaxed ride down the river or the evil little boy in me who gets enjoyment out of pelting people with tin cans? Whatever it is, I have been hooked on this game since I first played it in the arcades.

The game is quite simple, you are on an innertube and floating down different rivers. Along the way, there are obstacles to avoid like pointy branches, fishermen, whirlpools and more. Since you are on a inflatable device and it can easily be punctured, you must be careful. Each river is different and each has its share of tube popping hazards (sounds like a name for a rock band). But like all good games, there are items to help you. They come in the form of pop cans. While you may think these are for quenching your thirst, they are actually a weapon to ward off danger. They not only work nicely on the fishermen (and the guys shooting at you on later levels), but they can also take out the thorny plants and other obstructions.

One of the nice features of this game is the ability to have two players at a time. You are racing against each other to finish first. OF course this can lead to all kind of interesting predicaments. Nothing like forcing your buddy down the rapids to ruin his day or nudging him towards danger. This game can really cause some real battles, but it is a fun game!

Until I can get the MAME version to work, this will keep me satisfied. The Nintendo version is very close to the arcade, with only real difference I can see is the graphics. Of course I haven't played the arcade version in years, so I may just be excited to be able to play any version.

Ask the Programmer

Question-Was there ever a game you were offered to do that was such a bad idea or concept that you knew it was just destined to be bad?

I'll answer a slightly different question.

A long time ago, one of my workmates cultivated an air of, shall we say, sophistication. $50 glasses of (must be warmed) Cognac, bow tie, classical music collection... and a huge banner above his computer "LEGEND". Now, I'm sure you can picture him.

He delighted in appearance, over everything, and would go to just about any expense to maintain it. Suffice it to say, we were all rather amused when he was given "Barbie" on the NES as a project. I mean, what can you do with a title like that? The results say it all.

Put a bunch of (adolescent) male programmers on a title about Barbie Dolls, and just watch their assurance and self-confident sophistication ooze out the door in a pool of embarrassment. Games for girls never worked, did they. I'm glad that I wasn't given Barbie... the easter eggs I'd have put in... especially with Ken around ;)
(Bio: Andrew Davie. Programmer for numerous games on many different platforms including Atari 400/800, C64, NES and SNES. Been making games in the industry from 1984 - present. Currently working on real-time 3D interactive movies. Contact email: adavie@mad.scientist.com)

Chapter Two:Return to Pacland

After our disaster mission to retrieve some pellets from Pacman, we licked our wounds and remembered our fallen comrades. It was time to call some professionals. Since we were fighting ghosts, we knew we had to turn to the most known professionals in dealing with supernatural. So, I opened the phone book and looked up the Ghost Busters. So I dialed 1-800 Get-Ghost. Here is what I heard "The Number you have called...has been disconnected". What? What was I to do now? I needed some serious help if I was going to ever get my hands on those pellets. After much soul searching, I decided that I could not risk any more lives. This was my idea and I would complete the mission. I decided to go in alone. If I failed, then the mission would die with me. I wanted no more blood, pixilated or not, on my hands.

After some reconfiguring of the equipment, I was ready to go in. If nothing was gained from the prior mission, it was some knowledge of the enemy. I knew that conventional weapons didn't faze them and if I was to succeed, I needed to either find more sophisticated and deadly weapons or use cunning. These were stupid ghosts I was dealing with and I have seen Pacman outwit them numerous times. All I needed to do was study the game and figure out a strategy.

So I dug up some old books that taught you how to beat Pacman. Then I went and tried them out on the arcade machine. I tried and tried until I had the patterns down. After hours of exhaustive research (some would call it game playing, but it was anything but fun), I was ready! So I headed down to the deployment area and geared up. I only had one assistance, a college student by day and computer hacker by night. The Wizard as he likes to be called, was ready to beam into the game. We checked to make sure the two way radio was working and this time we had a few tricks to keep them from blocking our frequencies.

After saying my prayers, I was beamed down into the game. The first thing you

notice when you enter a game is the sheer size of it. The walls must have been fifteen feet high. I truly felt like a man among giants. Gulliver must have felt quite the same way. Once the shock wore off, I prepared to collect the samples. Looking down, I noticed that the dots floated in the air. I grabbed one and it easily came into my grasp. I looked at it and it looked odd. It was flat and thin like a tortilla shell. It had an almost two dimensional look to it. This was surprising as the rest of the area looked very three dimensional. So I grabbed a few of these and secured them into my backpack.

Finished with the first part of the mission, I decided to make contact. "Wiz come in, this is Crazy Climber" I spoke into the mike. Nothing. I sent the message again and still no response. They were blocking our signal again. That is when I went to plan two, I typed in the message on the computer that is built into the arm of my suit. After a few painfully long seconds, a message came back. It was a simple one word message, "RUN!!!!!" as I turned around there was a huge ghost bearing down on me. When I saw him, I quickly realized why the walls are so big. This thing was monstrous! It was nearly the size of an adult elephant and had a look of pure evil in its eyes. It was the red ghost and it was coming for me. I turned and ran as fast as my legs would allow. As I ran, I looked back and realized that it was gaining on me. Remembering the layout of the maze, I made tracks to the tunnel. I knew I couldn't outrun the creature and a escape was necessary. As I turned around a corner, all I could hear was that infernal music playing. The tempo seemed to increase, I don't know if this was my imagination or if the music really was speeding up. The ghost was within a few feet of me when I reached the tunnel. I literally dove into it and felt like I was pulled through. I was quickly deposited on the other side, just in time to see the yellow one coming. I made a quick right turn and headed to get the energizer. As I neared it, I could see that it was glowing. It was large and round, much like a basketball, but it had a eerie glow to it. I went to retrieve it and found it would not move. Unlike the dots, it was firmly stuck in place. I tried again to no avail. I then looked over my shoulder and saw a ghost headed right for me. The worst thing about these creatures is that they make no sound. They appear to float a few feet off the ground.

Realizing that collecting an energizer was a fruitless endeavor, I gave up and headed out. But the time wasted trying to get the energizer only allowed the ghosts to find me. As I tried to escape from the oncoming yellow one, I soon realized my path was blocked by the infuriated red ghost. I typed in quickly, "Beam me out of here!" and waited for the response. After a few seconds, the ghosts were nearly on top of me. There was only a few feet on either side of me and it was closing fast. The message popped up on my screen, "Attempt failed, goodbye". With death on both sides of me, I dropped to the ground and waited for the coming death.

After a few seconds, I opened my eyes and wondered if I was dead? I rolled over and looked up and saw the ghosts passing over me. Seems that these creatures cannot move vertically. They can only move back and forth on the same plane. As long as I stayed down here, I was safe. Once they passed over, I sat up and typed in "Still alive, how do I get out?". As the ghosts left in disgust, I stood up and shook myself off. Then the message came "Go to their house, can beam you up there". Great, now I had to go to the ghosts home to get out of here.

As I neared the home, I noticed that they were guarding it. They patrolled back and forth, ensuring I could not get in. Sure I could slide past them, but I didn't want to risk transporting one of them back with me. Who knows what havoc they could wreak in the real world?

Tune in next month for the thrilling conclusion! Will I escape the land of the Pacman or will I become another victim?

Before Nintendo/After Nintendo

As I have been buying Nintendo games both for myself and for sale, I started thinking about the different words and terminology that Nintendo (and the rest of the neo-classic games) has brought to the world. This has made us change the meaning of many words and what they mean to us. So here are some humorous examples of what different words and phrases meant before and after the arrival of Nintendo (the game system, not the company as I have no clue when they started)!

Before Nintendo the phrase "Save the Princess" brought memories of Star Wars.
After Nintendo the phrase "Save the Princess" inspires memories of Super Mario Bros.

Before Nintendo the name Bowser made us think of the lead singer of Sha Na Na.
After Nintendo the name Bowser makes us think of the main boss from Super Mario Bros.

Before Nintendo the name Sonic made us think of the basketball team from Seattle.
After Nintendo the name Sonic makes us think of a blue hedgehog.

Before Nintendo the name Zelda was lumped with Bertha and other names of girls you didn't want to go on a blind date with.
After Nintendo the name Zelda makes us think of the Links series of games.

Before Nintendo the name Link made us think of sausages.
After Nintendo the name Link makes us think of the lead character in Legend of Zelda.

Question of the month

I purposefully put this last to see how many people read the newsletter to the end. Anyway, here is the question of the month! Since the advent of emulators, have you found that it has increased, decreased or not affected the amount of time you spend playing your classic console games?

I personally have found it to decrease the amount of time I spend with the old systems. While I still play my Intellivision as much and a handful of Coleco games, I don't play some of the games I used to as much. Games like Jungle Hunt, Tapper and Time Pilot aren't as much fun, now that I can play the originals as opposed to the Coleco versions. But games like Fortune Builder and Cabbage Patch Kids are still more fun on the console than an emulator.

Conclusion

Well, that wraps up the first year of Retrogaming Times! I would like to thank everyone who took time to read it and especially everyone who contributed to making it happen! We will be back in a month when I will tackle the issue about the future of the classic gaming market and whether or not it will become the next hot collectible. Check back in 30 days and see what my opinions are. There will also be all the other great stuff you have come to expect. Now go grab a joystick and shoot a few aliens for me.

Tom Zjaba

(All pictures 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).