Beer and Gaming in Las Vegas - Part 1

A Collectors Look at the Classic Gaming Expo

by Geoff Voigt

Go to Page Two of the Classic Gaming Expo Coverage!

Go Back to Retrogaming Times 36!

(Photos by Geoff Voigt and Chris Breedon, with digital picture editing and help by Scott Cheshire.)
(with apologies to HST, and his large gun collection, for this intro.)

We were somewhere near Barstow, when the migraine finally took hold. I needed to drink some coffee, a lot of coffee, desirably enough to kill most laboratory animals. To make matters worse, we were late, we were incredibly late, in weekend traffic from LA to Las Vegas on the 15 Interstate North, and behind a livestock truck trying to play "Speed Racer" with some other yahoo who had the delusion that he was in some semblance of a sports car. Both of these epsilons were suddenly making me wish that I had a fair reproduction of the "Spy Hunter" car to make my life a little easier. (just the 2nd. amendment to the US Constitution and my driver's license, that's all I need...).

My brother Rob and I were carrying with us a 2600 and games, my 5200 setup with a pair of Wico joysticks, a Colecovision with Driving Controller and games, my Joyboard, 2 monitors, some 7800 carts for a system that was supposed to be there, a PlayStation and games, my SX-64 and all of the games I had for it, both disk and cart, a Famicom, enough CD's to power Studio 54 for a night, 2 cases of real sugar Dr. Pepper, my tradebait and Sticker boxes, and the odd collection of controllers, video cords, RF boxes, power strips, and extension cords one would need to run a setup like this. All for a party that I had been planning with my Compadre from Orange County, Chris Breedon, since about April or May. It was the party that I was most worried about.....

(An ad for the Bun Boy restaurant. These things are like the plauge along the I-15S.)

"Hey, cut the Hunter S. Thompson crap and JUST TELL ME WHAT WAS THERE!" Okay. just , and it'll take you down to it. After a brief repast at the infamous "Bun Boy" (insert your own joke here) Diner/Motel/Cheap but effective method to suck tourist dollars, over Rubens and enough Coffee in quantities so large that the staff was pointing at me as we left, Vegas was our ending destination. I have to admit that this was not only my first ever CGE, but this was my first ever visit to Las Vegas, a city that I'd always viewed as the somewhat slutty big sister to Disneyland. Being a complete LV newbie, naturally getting lost is part of that tender, touching first experience anyone can expect when encountering the wide bevy of exiting choices off of the I-15... "So Rob, I get off at Tropicana?" "No, look for Charleston and... USE YOUR %&$@^ BRAKES, GODDAMMIT!!!" We missed our turnoff. Having an older brother in the car with you is like your mother, but only louder and you can slug them; but I didn't. I just wanted to get to the Plaza. "Okaaayyy... what's our next option?" "Looks like Tropicana." I'll save you details. Our journey from the 15 to the Plaza was peppered with such phrases as "TURN LEFT, LEFT, LEEEEEEFFFTT!!!", and

"How could you miss that turn again!" Dear sweet Lord, I needed a cup of coffee.... "

Jackie Gaugan's Plaza Hotel has 24-hour gambling, Sports Bookies for betting on all of your favorite teams, and 'the 50's Diner' a place where you can get something to eat all hours of the day and night" What the pamphlet doesn't tell you is that when we got there, it also held at least 200 (on Fri. afternoon, more as time passed) of the most rabid and fanatical Classic Gaming fans that could get to the Expo. Here, one can do their "Look at me! I'm a classic gaming Fan" thing with pride. Go out into the Plaza with a small plush Pac-Man on your shoulder, you get thumbs up and others yelling "CGE! CGE!" like a football team. Do it in public in your hometown, and Mothers shield their kids from you, giving you looks that are normally reserved for the severely developmentally disabled, and the hand gesture given is certainly not Thumbs up..

Nothing says 'Vegas' more than an "Elvis" themed slot machine; and right next to it was something, or rather someone, who basically had "CGE" written all over him: my dear friend, suitemate, So-Cal Classic meeter, and fellow party coordinator Chris Breedon, wearing his t-shirt that has a classic Atari joystick on it. Nothing like a familiar face in an unfamiliar location to help ease the nerves; That and a $2.00 iced coffee while waiting to get our baggage. We learned two things when setting up for the party: One, pulling around a luggage cart filled to the brim with gaming systems and paraphernalia is quite possibly the best advertisement anyone can get for your soiree, and Two: auto locks in your car have the potential to make everyone inside look like absolute idiots. The stories behind them:

1: While moving our luggage rack with the aforementioned gaming list above, there were gawkers aplenty on the hotel floors; some pointed and gave thumbs up, some muttered under their breath. But when we entered the elevator, the best response of all was attained; there were 3 other people inside, and obviously quick studies, making the obvious query: "So, you guys are here for the Gaming Expo?" "Yeah, yeah we are." "Ummm.. who do you guys represent?" Represent? Yup, we really did have a lot of games. Thankfully, Chris B. was the first to put it together, "Oh! No one, this is just, us. We're having a party tonight, and figured gaming should be a part of it" We all shared a quick laugh and Chris gave them flyers for that night. (He's always very prepared) To say that "we" pulled our luggage cart would be a misnomer; that job was done by our Porter, Joey from New York, who regaled us with how he should have been off almost an hour ago, but was still very helpful in getting our stuff to the suite. I just felt he needed a small mention. :)

Story #2: All parties need snacks and drinks, and that requires a trip to a local grocery, which require a car trip. When driving by the hotel entrance from the car park, Chris and I spotted two others, a gal and a guy who were carrying an Inty and what looked to be a Video Pinball. We stopped the car, and just in case those two always carried around a Inty and VP, asked if they're, "here for the Expo?". We had flyers with us, 'ya know, in case we ran into other people carrying game systems or wearing Classic Game T-shirts while we were shopping for groceries ;9 , so Chris B. tries to open the door.... 'Ya ever tried to help

others get out of the car, while they themselves are opening the door? Ever done this several times, so often that the people outside probably think that you have some mental deficiency, and shouldn't be behind the wheel? I now have this knowledge, and thankfully we got past Mr. Goldfinger's "Bonneville of Doom" deathtrap and were able to give the two fellow CGE'ers invites. What was even cooler was that they showed up, with something I've been personally interested in ever since I've first heard about it.

(Every classic gaming party needs Joyboard Combat! Chris Breedon shows how it's done So-Cal style.)

(More on _that_ later) THE MILD BUNCH - A party at CGE is a wonderful way to meet new people, play against new opponents, and possibly even fish out cool items for others to see. At So- Cal meets, we have a semi-traditional fun time activity we do that people like: Joyboard Combat. Yes; the most common 2600 games, played with a pair of some of the most difficult controllers to find. The hardest part of this pastime is actually getting hold of two Amiga Joyboards, a difficult but not impossible task if you live in an area with a fair amount of collectors. The result is wacky fun for kids of all ages; add in some beer and proliferate amounts of swearing, and it becomes a party game of the highest caliber. This probably got the second biggest response of the night.

The rumored Wico Odyssey 2 Trac-Ball was there; One of our guests, Doug Childs, had it, and it would have been used, but like 70% of all O2's seen, this one had the hardwired sticks. Some of us were even willing to get soldering irons and hack a port right then and there to try it out. What got the biggest response was when our invitees from our car lock episode arrived; it turned out to be Chad Schell of the Intellicart project, and his roommate, Lissa Ackerman and he brought a prototype for demoing, but unfortunately we didn't have a PC in the suite at the time. Later on we did, and this gadget is truly marvelous; I got to play the home-brew Inty Tetris and the prototype League of Light because of this gadget. Obligatory plug for Chad's Intellicart page: http://www.schells.com/intellicart.html

ALWAYS GET THE 6' SANDWICH!!! - One of the biggest lessons to learn about party planning is that a party rarely ever ends when you think it will. Another lesson is that you don't have as much control over who arrives; such as when the planning staff of the Expo themselves come in your door, much like the old "Kool-Aid" ads from the 70's (I even swear I heard John H. say "Oh Yeah!" as he entered the door), looking like they've already enjoyed what I can guess is a no-host bar at the Expo banquet. The mind quickly goes through the following stages: Shock: "Huh? I thought we just ended the party!" Denial: "No, this can't be them." Anger: "But this is a No Smoking Suite!" Bargaining: "Maybe I can get some good trades off of them" Depression: "Those couch cushions are gonna need to be fluffed up tomorrow" Acceptance: "Lets get out the rest of the sandwich and FIRE UP SOME WARLORDS!!!"

Some attendees from Def Con 5 were quickly added to the mix; as was my Haysi Fantayzee CD, (some of the most bizzare 80's music you will ever hear; I love 'em!) my dear brother Rob starts up the Inty, and before you know it, the party had a second life, and I'm showing "funbunching" tricks on Diner to Tom Russo of Next Gen magazine and participating in who can do the best Bill Murray "Caddyshack" shtick.

What I've taken away with me from this experience: A party on Fri. night at CGE is a must-have; Chris and I are already thinking of what to do next year; ideas involving a Yak and pneumatic drills have been ruled out. Next year, Joey from New York will be taking the

luggage cart through the main lobby. Good advertising. Ripping off Joe Santulli's description of how they entered the suite is a good way to kill writer's block. For the roughly 4 of you who're reading this and haven't gone to the Digital Press site to see what I mean, it's www.digitpress.com.

"Cheeky Hotdog %&@%#'ers" (editor note: since this is a family publication, we leave the profanity to your imagination. If you lack an imagination, you can email Geoff and he will gladly fill in the blanks) would be a great name for a Punk Band John Hardie+beer+what I think was tainted turkey in the sandwich=a worry that a cardiac team should be called up. But he was having fun. That was Sean Kelly? Geez, he's mellow! Plan the party to never end earlier than 1 A.M. Don't try to get up earlier than 7 AM; you'll just need more coffee than normal.

Good Points:
Friends and acquaintances: You make some friends on the net, when posting on RGVC for over 6 years; and it was nice to finally put faces to the names I've been reading all this time: Lee Krueger and Hans Reutter from Seattle, "Ianoid" from Chicago, Now So-Cal resident Willian Cassidy, Russ Perry Jr, Lee Seitz, etc... This was half the reason I came. (Lee, Hans, Give us a month or more notice and we'll round up a decent LA Raiding Party for one of your meets!)

(**Chad Schell showing off his Intellicart Prototype. Having seen one in action, I now want one; bad.)**

Prototypes and gadgets: the Intellicart and playing League of Light were wonderful; Any red-blooded Classic Gamer will want both of these.

Nagging questions answered: I now know that there was never a stage of Yar's Revenge that ever looked like Star Castle, that there were about 10,000 copies of Quadrun made, (as to what happened to them, I have no idea), and somewhere in Fresno, CA, there are possibly up to 20 original Computer Modules. Some might be in thrift store right now... (Geoff packs up his car and drives to Fresno...).

Bad Points:
The Keynote speeches were packed too closely together: I'd get out of one, talk to maybe one or two people, and then the announcement for the next one would come up. Some breathing room, time to shop and get a cup of coffee would be appreciated guys. But I am sympathetic to wanting to give all the veterans a chance to have their say, and share their war stories.

That damned down escalator from 3rd to the 2nd floor. Running down the up set didn't look as cool that 50th time. But it was still fun! :) (The first person to mail me saying I could have just walked down the unmoving one will get a cattle prod aimed right at their Eli's Ladder...) I'm used to the heat, so it wasn't as bad for me.

In a related note, here's a section I'll just call, "lost sequels".... Ms. Gorf: a rumor floating around classicdom is that of a sequel to Gorf, called Ms. Gorf. Jamie Fenton, the programmer of Gorf and Ms., gave me the lowdown on it's whereabouts: "It's sitting in this

box, on 8-inch floppies, just waiting for me to get it onto some sort of modern development system... development had to be halted due to the videogame crash. Occasionally I kick around the idea of doing Ms. Gorf." I told her that we'd all like to see it un-mothballed, and to play the thing. "What I'd like to see is an effort to preserve all the lost games on obscure disk formats, because I think that they're just as important as the games seen as the final products. I'm hoping to go around and asking if anyone has the means to take these 8-inch floppies and transfer them to a CDR" If anyone has the means to do this, I'd like to help. This sounds like a project tailor-made for some of the MAME developers. If Jamie's reading this, or any of the MAME guys, or just someone who has a working 8" drive and a computer, give me a mail. I'll figure out who to mail next. We'll go the "6 degrees of separation" route.

Pizza Time: before there was Diner, there was talk about a Burgertime sequel called "Pizza Time" and/or "French Fries", but no screen shots or release date was ever announced. A talk with Keith Robinson at the Intellivision Productions booth gave some answers, and as many questions. "Pizza Time was just an idea made by the Executives. The name 'Pizza Time' came about because they thought it sounded 'sequeley' enough. The programming was to be done by the French Guys [Nice Ideas], and we have yet to get any contact from them about this. There might not be a single bit of Pizza Time even programmed; we just don't know" So the name may be all that there is of this idea. But I've also heard (very unsubstantiated) rumors that I don't believe, but want to look into further, that PT was also to be an arcade game.....:

("And then the great Bira Bira said, 'Let there be carts'". The opening of the Expo had so much anticipation you could wring it out of your clothes.)

JUST SHOW ME WHAT WAS THERE!" EXHIBITORS

Hasbro exhibited several games, Frogger 2 for PS and DC, Galaga and Super Breakout for PS and PC, and Pac-Man for the PC. The breakdown of each:

Pac-Man: the controls on this are smooth and almost razor-sharp. The maze designs are unique, but nothing like the original arcade mazes. If you got irritated by the new mazes in Pac-Man World, you might not like the new additions; elements like a second level/story, and a river (with a crocodile, immune to the power pill) were on the levels I was able to play. the Ghost AI was sorely lacking, but hopeful there's enough time to fix that. Paccy can jump, just like in Pac-Mania, and many of the graphics look like Pac-Man World. When I asked about future plans, the reps told me that Ms. Pac-Man for the PC was coming out next year; but no other knowledge than that. We'll probably see her game next year.

<CLICK HERE FOR PACMAN PICTURES!>

Super Breakout: made by the same development team responsible for new Pong, and it shows. The paddle characters are back, and I've noticed that you either love them or hate them; no middle ground. But the gameplay is great, and new twists on the old Breakout theme are evident, most of them having an odd attraction to farm animals; but that was probably just the levels I was able to see. The favorite one of mine was the "Chicken

Breakout" game setting: your paddle is in a barn, with large stacked bales of hay in varied heights with chickens on top of each stack. the ball removes a bale, until a chicken is on the floor. Once a chicken gets hit (can you see it coming?), she lays 3 eggs/balls to compound the difficulty. At one point I was maintaining 9 balls, and it wasn't easy, but I can play SB kind of well.

<CLICK HERE FOR BREAKOUT PICTURES!>

Galaga: I wasn't able to play this myself, but what I was able to see was interesting; some hard-core classic heads won't like the changes, but I'm intrigued. Imagine if you will a hybrid between the original Galaga and the StarFox series from Nintendo. The enemies fly in Galaga-style formations, but the flight style and perspective is that of SF. While I didn't see it, I was told by the Hasbro reps that the Ship capture feature was in the game, and after I mentioned Gaplus to them, they mentioned to me that later on in the New Galaga, a player would be able to capture the enemy ships, too.

<CLICK HERE FOR GALAGA PICTURES!>

Frogger 2: Take Frogger, and change the placement of the ending Lilly pads to other places on the screen. The one screen I played used the original graphics from the arcade game, pixel for pixel except for Frogger and/or Lilly, and had walls in the middle of the screen that act like the screen edge. I guess Hasbro listened and is trying to make Frogger 2 more like the original game. No mention of Clyde the Dragon or Mama Duck, however.... http://www.atari.com will get you to the info about these new games.

<CLICK HERE FOR FROGGER 2 PICTURES!>

Intellivision Productions probably had the most popular booth in the entire Expo; for several reasons: first off was the debut of two 2600 games, Swordfight and Sea Battle, (the latter being the Atari version of the Intellivision game) and a Colecovision game "Steamroller", programmed by Dave "Beamrider" Rolfe over 15 years ago and now finally getting its release. I bought a Steamroller, and it's simply a wonderful game. GET IT! It's a rare moment when a game that has that classic feel gets out into the buying public. would have bought a Swordfight too, but both 2600 games sold out before lunchtime, from what I was told. The second reason was their "Video Karaoke" contest, running scenes from B-17 Bomber, Frog Bog, Astrosmash, and Major Leauge Baseball.

(Intellicake anyone?)

On Sun., the 20th birthday of the Inty was celebrated, (see accompanying photos) with Keith Robinson in a Bugertime Hat and Apron. The "Intellicake", as it was dubbed, was quickly devoured, and I was able to get a few moments with Mr. Robinson to pick his brain, mostly about unreleased games; and I was given the chance to see and play some of them on a laptop one of the other BSR's brought; www.intellivisionlives.com.

Rocky and Bullwinkle: Control Rocky to intercept Boris Baddenoff's floating numbers and get them to Bullwinkle's plane. Apparently a mathematical educational game.

Choplifter: The Inty port of the Dan Gorlin game. doesn't have sound, and apparently crashes frequently. No pun intended. Control was fair, but I crashed (into the ground) 2/3 times.

Scarfinger: Kinda like a 1st. person version of the Parker Bros. James Bond game. Has a motorcycle on a cliff, and an underwater sequence.

Yogi's Frustration: (Or, as I called it, "Boo-Boo's Wacky Brain Trauma Trial") Player controls Boo-Boo, on a scaffold of ladders and conveyor belts. you must help feed Yogi's addiction to picnic baskets while he works at the top of the screen. Control was difficult, and I fell often, usually not knowing why I did.

Spina the Bee: A horizontal scroller that has the player as the Bee in question pollinating flowers. Apparently based off of a European cartoon character. (If anyone knows of a website about the original Spina, I'd like to see it).

Illusions: The Inty version of the Nice Ideas game eventually released for the Colecovision. I noticed no differences between the CV or Inty version, other than the given graphical changes. [end of comments]

Some of the arcade games lining the walls were supplied by **Blast from the Past Amusements**; a restorer of classic full sized arcade games. They had some cabinets for sale, and can be found at: www.arcadeclassics.com.

Twin Galaxies was on hand to record scores of the best scores, both arcade and home, and Billy Mitchell offered $5,00 to anyone who could break the world record score for Joust, set in 1985: 1,537,050. No one got the cash, but promises were made for records to be broken and new opportunities for that to happen next year. TG has their own breakdown of the events at www.twingalaxies.com.

Cosmi Software was giving out free C64 Emu's with the original Super Huey on them, and showing off their new re-do of the Chopper simulator, Super Huey 3. Not bad. It had been a while since I played my SH, so crashing became common for me. www.superhuey.com has ordering info and screenshots.

Retroactive Games are a group of PC game programmers that are devoted to making new games with the classic spirit. They had some game packs available for sale, and can be found at Retroactive-gaming.com.

GAME RETAILERS included:

Telegames US (Who were able to provide me with C64 carts of Zone Ranger, Zenjii and Pitfall; those first two having been on my want list for quite a while) had stuff I had never seen, such as IBM PC Jr. versions of River Raid and Pitfall, Neo Geo Color Faslei (don't know if it's the English or Japanese version), and just piles and piles of carts; if you collected the system, they had a few games for it. I really doubt any classic collectors don't know thier URL: www.telegames.com.

CGE Services had their T-Shirts, Sean Kelley's multicarts, boxed games and their showpiece for the Expo: the CV version of Power Lords, the rare O2 cart much-sought after by collectors of that systems. I myself didn't see CV PL in action, but word on the floor was that it wasn't that different from the original version, but has better graphics and smoother gameplay. Production was limited to 50 copies, and some carts are still available. (If the T-shirts could only be available in 3-4XL...).

United Games Source had something I was curious about, but had heard of: a portable Famicom, with its own screen and everything. These went fast, real fast. They also had Lynx games, some Classic material, and computer peripherals. URL: www.unitedgames.com.

B&C Computervisions was loaded with Atari material. Just loaded. Anyone that can provide a 5200 trac-ball for a RT writer needing it gets high praise. The Ms.Pac-Man promotional mobiles were fun, and they had/have 7800 development cards. URL:

www.myatari.com.

Marvin Lambright Sales had bulk amounts of many carts, including a CIB 5200 Centipede to compliment a certain newly purchased trac-ball. URL unknown.

Songbird Productions keep the Jaguar and Lynx flame alive, with their new Lynx and Jaguar Games, and a new Rapid-fire controller for the Jag. I played the new Jag game Protector with the rapid-fire, and besides it being a really good game, one can let it rip with the RF setting. Protector is smooth; in graphics, movement, and gameplay. The Lynx offerings included "Crystal Mines 2; Buried Treasure" with a CD- ROM for your PC (and a cable to attach your Lynx to the PC) that lets one edit and create new CM levels. A CGE-only version of Remnant, a 3-D shooter for the Atari-made portable, was also available. go to http://songbird.atari.net for ordering info.

Cyberpunks Entertainment was selling their 3 current offerings: the **"Stella at 20"** videotapes, vol. 1&2, and their popular "**Stella Gets a New Brain**" CD for the Supercharger, with all the SC games on it, 2600 programming info, and some recent homebrews for the 2600. Stella at 20 is interviews with some of the original 2600 programmers, done at Nolan Bushnell's house a while back. These products are also availible on their site: http://www.geocities.com/Hollywood/1698/cyberpunks/index.html.

Howard Scott Warshaw, other than being on the 2600 Panel, had is "**Once Upon Atari**" videos for sale. Featuring interviews with other fellow Atari programmers, and his own stories, the tapes can be obtained via order at www.scottwest.com.

GAMING MEDIA that were there: Imagine Media was handing out free stuff, mostly posters of barley-dressed Animebabes, some squishy retro-robots, and what I thought were coasters. While there, their Jump-rope team came by for a competition; I guess this is some sort of in-joke, or just another example of corporate largesse used in the name of ogling. But I wish the Team well. Why, I don't know. URL: www.dailyradar.com.

Digital Press had issues for sale, and just a general Expo presence. I was able to see a plush Q*Bert at their stand. Now I know exactly what I'm looking for. :) For those of you who skipped over the Fri. night story, it's www.digitpress.com.

Classic Gamer Magazine was right next to DP, selling issues and T-shirts with their logo on them. Special thanks to Chris Cav for showing up Fri. night. The rest of the staff had trouble finding me or the suite#. :6 You'll probably start seeing my name in CG every once in a while, too.
URL: www.classicgamer.com.

Cyberroach.com was sharing a booth with DP, and had some loose and boxed carts for sale. (CV Tutunkham! YAY!) Cyro is a quarterly mag based out of the Seattle area and available at www.cyberroach.com.

Special thanks to all the gaming media guys for making this RT reporter feel at home. It was nice.

Go to Page Two of the Classic Gaming Expo Coverage!

Go Back to Retrogaming Times 36!