Retrogaming Times

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Tables are Going Fast!

This is your friendly reminder that if you want to get a table for the CCAG (Classic Computer and Game show), then you may want to act quickly. We already have commitments for 45 tables and there are only about 15 indoor tables left. We can put another 20 tables outside, but with the humidity of Cleveland in the summer, you probably want to be indoors.

Attendance is also looking very good, with commitments that is more than double last year's attendance. And with a price of free for both admission to the show and for tables, you cannot complain about costs.

Some of the highlights will include a television room that will show classic video game cartoons, including Dragon's Lair, Pacman and Saturday Morning Supercade as well as classic video game commercials and an episode of Starcade!

With a number of dealers committed, there will be thousands of video and computer games for sale! These will include older games like Atari and Intellivision to newer ones like Nintendo 64 and Playstation. Lots of games, other software and hardware for all the Atari, Commodore and Texas Instrument computers will also be available. Whether you are a Commodore 64 or Atari ST or TI 99/4A fan or any other computer, there will be stuff for you to buy!

Food service will be provided, with a wide variety of food and beverages to buy at the show, so there is no need to leave the show for lunch. Also, there will be an after show pizza party!

There will be tons of classic game systems and computers set up for play! Also, emulators will be set up with arcade style joysticks. And there will also be a number of arcade games

set up for free play! A cocktail Crazy Climber has been confirmed as well as a few other games that have yet to be announced! All the latest news and information can be found at the official CCAG site:

http://tomheroes.com/ccag.htm

The Holy Grail

One of the most misused terms in classic video games is the term, "Holy Grail". It is used to describe a nearly unattainable object. Most hobbies have a pretty clear cut "Holy Grail", baseball cards with the Honus Wagner card, comic books with the Action #1 and stamps with the upside plane stamp, but classic games do not. I have seen many carts given this title, carts such as Chase the Chuckwagon, Crazy Climber, Swordquest: Waterworld, Tooth Protectors, etc... But none of these really are "THE Holy Grail".

Sure, these are desirable carts, but a "holy grail" should be something that is very hard to find. All of these carts can be found on eBay with some frequency. While they will set you back some money, their value isn't that extreme. Not like a T-206 Honus Wagner, which will cost you $500,000 or an Action #1 (Superman's first appearance), which will also cost around $200,000. But in classic games, the most expensive cart only sells for a few hundred, unless you talk about the true holy grail, an unreleased prototype, especially one that is a one of a kind and of a game that people have an interest.

But which prototype is the most coveted? That is a question that I do not know. My guess is it would be a game for the Atari 2600 as it was the most collected system. It would have to be something that most collectors would want, like a Swordquest: Airworld or an arcade conversion. But even then it would be a hotly debated topic. But it is safe to say that prototypes are indeed the real holy grails. By prototypes, I mean a prototype of an unreleased game and one that was made in very limited quantity (10 or fewer copies or somewhere in that neighborhood).

The Worst of the Atari 2600

By the David Mrozek, The Video Game Critic

Most classic gamers love the Atari 2600, thanks to its sturdy design, huge library, and high availability. But let's be honest - a sizeable percentage of its games were really, really bad. In this article I'll take a look at some of the worse titles for the system. These games are either incredibly frustrating, butt-ugly, painfully boring, unforgivably sloppy, or just plain dumb. Like movies, some video games are so bad that they're good! It's entertaining just making fun of them. Just be thankful you didn't pay full price for these turkeys!

ET The Extra-Terrestrial (Atari 1982)
I can remember all the way back to 1982 when I got ET as a surprise Christmas present! I couldn't believe how lucky I was to get such an expensive game! And when I saw that awesome title screen and heard the ET theme, I thought for sure I had struck gold. I played it for days, and somehow convinced myself it was a good game. Denial is an ugly thing. Twenty years later, I've come to terms with my feelings. The truth is, ET is incredibly frustrating and almost completely devoid of fun. The object is to avoid bad guys whiles collecting phone parts hidden in pits. The problem is, these pits are EVERYWHERE! You can barely move without accidentally keep falling into one of these annoying things! Is this supposed to be fun? Who play-tested this crap? I've seen the movie, and I don't remember ET falling into ONE pit, much less 100 of them! When you're not in a pit, a symbol at the top of the screen indicates what you can do (call Elliott, eat candy, locate piece, etc.). The game has some nice animation and some nice touches (the flower), but gameplay glitches, poor design, and confusing controls make it a struggle from start to finish. It was obviously a rush job. Atari was ultimately forced to bury its inventory of ET cartridges in a concrete landfill. Believe me, they did us all a favor.

Cruise Missile (Froggo 1987)

Froggo was one of the most despised Atari 2600 game manufacturers, releasing just about anything to make a buck. In this infamous shooter, you guide a UFO over a planet while shooting at various surface and underground structures. Your UFO looks suspiciously like the one in Laser Blast. What exactly makes this game so bad? Maybe it's the poor control, which forces you to push the joystick in the direction you want to shoot. Perhaps it's the repetitive, uninspired gameplay. Or maybe it's the stomach-turning graphics and poor sound effects. It's probably a combination of all of the above, but any way you look at it, Cruise Missile is one sorry game. In addition, nowhere in the game or instructions is there a hint on why they named thing "Cruise Missile" in the first place.

Brain Games (Atari 1979)

Brain Games is one of several Atari games designed for use with the 12-button keypad controllers. And let me tell you, it's a sad bunch. The illustration on Brain Games shows a wizard casting a magical spell. Apparently it's a "sleep" spell, because this game made me want to take a nap! Most of the variations are "Simon" type games in which you need to repeat a growing sequence of keys or numbers. Let's face it, that may have been fun in the 1970's, but… check that - it wasn't even that fun back then! Other variations challenge you to find the symbol "that doesn't belong". This reminds me of those cognitive learning tests they give to first graders - painful! Finally, there's a variation that lets you play "music" with your keypad. This makes your Casino keyboard look like a grand piano!

Double Dragon (Activision 1989)

Considering when this title came out (late 80s), it is surprisingly horrendous. Double Dragon is all about walking the streets and kicking some ass. These side-scrolling fighters were hugely popular on most 8 and 16 bit game systems. But in this version, the characters are tiny, and their moves are not represented well on screen. Press a button and a small appendage appears. Whoopee. Attempting to perform special moves is frustrating. The fighters never seem to actually make CONTACT with each other, and it's difficult to tell what's going on (did I hit him, or did he hit ME?!). Worse yet, once a bad guy lands a shot on you, you tend to lose control as your man gets beaten to a pulp. I'd recommend joining a gang before I'd recommend buying this game. Besides, everybody's doing it.

Journey Escape (Data Age 1982)

Turn on this game and listen carefully. Isn't that the tune to "Don't Stop Believing"? That doesn't sound half bad! But please, don't start believing that this game is any good! Journey Escape is definitely horrible, with mindless gameplay and laughable graphics. You control individual members of the group who need to march up the screen while avoiding groupies and greedy promoters. The object is to guide all four members to their spaceship in time. The symbolic obstacles look absolutely ridiculous. For example, the promoters are floating heads, and the groupies are big hearts with legs. The screen displays how much money you have, and this total decreases whenever you get hit. This scoring system really doesn't make any sense, since you lose money as you progress. The game is monotonous on the normal difficulty, and just plain annoying on the high difficulty setting. Its novelty value may attract collectors, but it's not much of a game.

Karate (Froggo 1987)

This game is an absurdly awful abomination. This may be the worst fighting game ever. Let's hope so! The two fighters are large but blocky to the max! The way their bodies gyrate, it looks like they're dancing with each other! The fighters move slowly, and the control is practically non-existent. This game is unplayable! The punch and kick animations are laughable, and you can't even tell if you're making contact. Your opponent can be right up against you, yet he's always just out of reach. When it comes to fighting games, this is the worst!

Star Ship (Atari 1977)

Take Star Raiders, remove all the strategic elements, give it some of the most hideous graphics ever seen, and you have a game called Star Ship. I know this game is really old, but that doesn't make it immune from my wrath. The main game variation is a first-person shooter where you try to blast as many big blocky aliens as possible within 2 minutes 16 seconds. Some variations allow a friend to control the aliens you shoot at. Believe me, if you make someone play Star Ship with you, they won't be your friend for long! There are some other incredibly lame variations in which you just try to avoid oncoming squares - umm I mean "asteroids". The last few "lunar lander" variations are truly pathetic. You basically move your little ship to the asteroid and push the button. Incredibly, there's NO gravity, and hence, no challenge! What an embarrassment! No wonder Atari yanked it.

Sssnake (Data Age 1982)
Anybody wondering why the video game crash of 1983 took place needs to look no further than this game. This is the kind of trash game companies were spewing out by the dozens. As far as the gameplay goes, Sssnake amounts to a poor man's Centipede. Your cannon moves around the perimeter of a small box in the center of the screen. The object of the game is to shoot creatures running around the screen while avoiding the snakes. The snakes look like dotted lines, and shooting them has unpredictable results. Sometimes they become smaller and sometimes they split, but mostly your shots just go right through them and nothing happens. The other creatures are pixelated blobs. Control is awkward, to say the least. This looks like an unfinished project. It’s got to be one of the sssloppiest games I’ve ever seen.

Oink! (Activision 1983)
In this rare misstep from Activision, you control three little pigs trying to protect their houses from a wolf. You move a pig around the interior of his house, grabbing bricks from the top of the screen, and using them to fill in holes made by a wolf blowing out bricks on the bottom. If a hole gets too big, you're bacon. With each pig you have a different house (straw, wood, brick) but they all play the same. The graphics are actually quite good. The pigs and the wolf in particular are large and well detailed. But this game suffers from a serious lack of fun. Going back and forth carrying bricks to the biggest hole is boring, mind-numbing, and hard on the wrist. There is really no variety or strategy in this game, making for a very unpleasant gaming experience.

Swordquest Earthworld (Atari 1982)
The Swordquest series was designed to be a four-game series, each with its own puzzle. Solving all four games would reveal a monumental secret. Unfortunately, the series started just before the big video game crash and as a result, only Earthworld and Fireworld were widely released. Waterworld is an extremely rare collector's item, and the fourth title, Airworld, was never even made. It light of those events, I think it's safe to say that the project was a huge failure. So I don't feel too bad about trashing this horrendous game. It’s designed to be used with a comic book, an idiotic idea if I ever heard one. You control a man who looks a lot like Mr. Rogers in a light-blue sweater and light green pants. As you walk aimlessly from room to room, you will find many useless, boring objects. Some rooms provide challenging mini-games with some of the most heinous graphics and gameplay you've ever seen. That's about it. This is some ill-conceived garbage. The sad part is, this was supposed to be the sequel to Adventure, one of the most beloved Atari 2600 game ever made! But these Swordquest games are only of value to collectors. Steer clear.

Swordquest Fireworld (Atari 1982)
Here's the second title of the ill-conceived, ill-fated, and just plain ill series of Swordquest games. In this unexciting chapter, your man is a solid color (no blue sweater!), and the rooms all have CIRCULAR obstacles in them this time (wow). The method for manipulating items is the same as in Earthworld, but it doesn't matter because you don’t care about those worthless things! You just want to play those mini-game challenges! And boy oh boy do we have some stinkers here. Whether you're catching birds with a Mexican blanket, or shooting at turkeys with a slingshot, the medieval fantasy theme really shines through. Of course, those are just my interpretations of the poor graphics. I'm sure other people could come up with even more imaginative stuff, but you get the idea. This game is one of the absolute worst, and should be the object of much ridicule.

For over 1200 more reviews, check out The Video Game Critic’s site at

Wild Cart Kingdom

Hello and welcome to Wild Cart Kingdom. I am your host, Marlin Atari and today we will be searching for the elusive Atari 2600 system in the wild. We will attempt to capture and save this vanishing species. With the help of my trusty sidekick, Jim, we will hunt the elusive creature and save it from extinction.

(Hey, is that supposed to be me?)

We will start in one of the hiding places of the elusive beast, the thrift store. Jim is now searching over at the electronics department for the beast. "Jim do you see any Ataris?"

Jim-"Sorry, there doesn't seem to be any. I did find a bare Nintendo, with no controllers or power supply."

The Nintendo is a distant relative of the Atari, but it is still very plentiful. If you look closely at this species, you will see that it is the front mouthed Nintendo, the more common of the two Nintendo 8-Bit species. As I look closer at this one, I see it has been tagged, probably by a research team who is following its migration habits. You can see the distinct, green tag that reads $8.00. We will continue onward.

Our next visit will be to another possible habitat, the garage sale. As we pull into the garage sale, I send Jim forward to ask the guide about any sightings. As he does that, I look over the tables of odd and unusual items. Jim returns with the following message:

Jim-"They said they had some old systems, but couldn't remember what they were and threw them out."

This is a sad occurrence that happens too often. A family takes in one of these wild machines and after awhile, they tire of it and instead of setting it free, they just dispose of it, like a used tissue. People really do not understand how important to the planet these gentle creatures are. Not until they are all gone will they understand their importance.

After a long drive, we head to the last stronghold of the elusive Atari, the flea market. With some hope, one of the three primary species will be hiding here. The Atari is made up of three primary families, the 2600s, the 5200s and the 7800s. Each of these families has subspecies, with the 2600s having the most variety. There is the highly coveted 6 switch woodgrains, who are coveted for their hides. There are also the 4 switch woodgrains, the 2600 juniors, the smallest of the species. There are also the Sears family and a few others that are quite rare.

Tune in next month as Marlin and Jim try to bag the elusive Atari 2600.

Why?

By Fred Wagaman

There have been some discussions in the past concerning the viability of the non-cartridge console games as collectable. Long ago, Digital Press decided not to include CD games in their guide. I respect that. It is their guide and they can compile it as they wish.

While CD-based consoles have not been around as long as cartridge-based, I believe they need to be listed and given a degree of rarity/demand.

Let's take a look at the systems in question.

Sega CD
Turbografx-CD/Turbo Duo/PC-Engine
3DO
Sega Saturn

Among those, several are still active platforms. So let's toss out Dreamcast, Playstation and Playstation 2. The PC-FX was a Japan-only machine from the same company that made the Turbografx and the PC-Engine. That leaves us with 6 machines.

I've seen pieces and parts of listings for each of these machines. Usually just alphabetic listings. No rarity or dollar value. Some of the better sites I found (at least for the Sega CD) were European.

So why isn't there a compilation for these machines?

Is it because there are too many titles for them?

I don't think so. I think the Saturn ranks in with around 250 U.S. released titles and maybe about twice that for Japan. A few others were released only in Europe. The Turbo/PC-Engine probably has the most CD titles overall (with the exception of the still active Playstation). I'm sure the Neo Geo CD has less than 100 and 3DO can't have more than 250. That is not that many games.

It is because there are no good games on any of these systems?

Again, I don't think so. Some of those machines have some real dogs. But there are great games for each of those systems. Some have them few and far between, but they're there.

Are CD-based games collectable?

That's the real question, isn't it? While many of us are proud of our classic game collections, our more modern collections get little respect. How many people will go out of their way to spend big bucks on a Sega Saturn or Sega CD title because it is rare? How many people would do that if it was an Atari 2600 game?

While I was at the Philly Classic Show last month, I saw someone pay $250 for an Atari Swordquest Waterworld.

Have you ever played any of the Swordquest games? Those kind of bucks weren't paid because it was a fun game to play!

Instead, the person paid for the perceived value of the game based on its history. (you could only get it from Atari directly) and not because it was a "good" game.

No one would ever pay that kind of money for an Atari 2600 game just because to was a good or fun to play.

With the CD-based systems, there seems to not only be an interest in rarity, but also, people will pay for the quality of the game. Some of the highest price games for the Saturn are, arguably, some of the best. Dragon Force and Panzer Dragoon Saga are a couple examples of this. In addition to being good games, some of the last games for the system (Burning Rangers, Magic Knight Rayearth, etc.) also command a high price because of their low print runs.

On the CD-based systems, a premium price also seems to be placed on RPG games.

Should an effort be put in place to collect information, rate for rarity and publish a list of the CD console games? Would it be worth the effort? What do you think?

(Fred has been playing games for over 25 years and actively collecting them for over 10. The 2500 + games that he has takes up most of his home office and living room. He lives in Denver, PA with his understanding wife Jennie, his 5 year-old, button-loving son, Max and his 21 month old, 4th player, Lynzie. The jury has spoken. Guilty as charged. Some of the suggested punishments were quite severe. Since this was his first offense of throwing something away (something his wife testified to and the judge saw first hand), he was let off with time served and probation. Another failure of our judicial system. He can be reached at fcw3@postoffice.ptd.net).

The Many Faces of . . . Mario Bros.

By Alan Hewston

In 1983 Nintendo gave Mario the spotlight he deserved, after first retrieving his girlfriend from Donkey Kong, and then fending off Donkey Kong Jr. Originally a carpenter, Mario is now joined by his brother Luigi and as plumbers, try to rid an underground sewer of several pests. In this classic "platform" game, the pests arrive from the large pipes on the top of four platforms and move L/R until they fall off the edge of a platform, drop down to the next level, and eventually exit the bottom via another pipe, only to re-emerge from the pipes at the top. The pests are turtles (Shellcreepers), crabs (Sidesteppers) and fireflies (Fighterflies). There is also Slipice, who can turn an entire platform into an icy (slippery) surface, and 2 types of fireballs that will burn you up. Mario can play solo, or be joined in a two-player game by his partner Luigi. You can either play cutthroat and let the pests knock off your brother, or you can work together and protect each other's back - which is helpful in achieving really high scores.

The pests head the direction the pipe is facing and continue until they bump into anything and then change directions. This can make for quite an impressive traffic jam on the screen, as the slower objects (fireflies), and any critters turned over will make everything keep reversing directions, all while more critters enter the screen from above, or fireballs arrive. There are smart fireballs that can move up and down and fake you out as well. The dumb fireballs simply cross the screen and then disappear. You can only stop critters and fireballs in 2 ways. First, punch them from below (ie jump up and hit the ceiling above you); or by hitting the POW block at the middle of the bottom level - which upsets everything on a platform floor. If a critter is upset, it either disappears (fireballs, Slipice), or falls on its back, where you then have a few seconds to knock them into the water before they right themselves. Once righted, they move even faster than before. The crabs take 2 hits to upset them on to their backs. The fireballs and fireflies do not come in contact with the floor very often, so it is only then that they can be punched from below. You get double, triple or quadruple points for each successive pest knocked off at the same time. The POW can only be used 3 times and then disappears. Bonus coins come out for each pest eliminated, and then there are bonus coins rounds where the screen is filled only with coins, but you only have 20 seconds to collect them all. During every bonus round (8, and every 5 rounds thereafter) the POW gets reset to have 3 charges again. The game continues to speed up with faster and greater numbers of pests per round, not to mention more frequent Mario-seeking (smart) fireballs. Extra lives are earned typically at every 20,000 points. I wish that I had my favorite "Partner" to play each of the 2-player simultaneous versions.

Mario Bros. was fairly popular just as the video game crash arrived, but Mario's fame skyrocketed when he became "Super" Mario, in 1986. Mario is generally more well-known world-wide, than a certain rodent residing in central Florida. This innovative "punch-the-ceiling-from-below" attack made for a new paradigm and spawned many more sequels using this somewhat non-violent attack to break bricks, kill enemies, and to find coins, warp levels, power ups, prizes and all sorts of neat stuff. Mario Bros. also made it onto many systems following the classic "Joystick" era.

[C64 version is a treat]

Arcade Game Designed in 1983 by Nintendo master designer Shigeru Miyamoto

Classic Platforms: Atari 2600, 5200, 7800, Atari 8 bit, Apple II & Commodore 64

I was unsuccessful at finding credits for any of the programmers - too bad.

Categories: Gameplay, Addictiveness, Graphics, Sound & Controls

Disqualified: Apple II (N/A)
Like most of you, I do not own an Apple II or any other disk-only system - which is the sole reason for the disqualification. Atarisoft did make most of the arcade blockbusters on diskette for the Apple II. It appears to be a pretty good version from screenshots and other internet sources and may have earned a Bronze.

Have Nots: Atari 2600 (31)
The Gameplay is adequate (4) in that you can tell that this is Mario Bros. but there are many problems, and features missing, making this article long. The Gameplay includes a 2 player version; bonus coin rounds; wafers (bonus coins are actually wafers); Slipice; slippery ice; plus some difficulty options - unique to the 2600 (fireballs on/off making for a nice kids option and number of lives 3 or 5). Here are some of the problems: No head room on top level; cannot land on POW; fall off sides - just from jumping straight up; very bad physics & choppy motion; double death due to almost no delay between a death and the next life (this just takes getting used to); the second? critter on the screen at one time changes direction at the first ledge, and the critters never reverse directions from bumping anything; there is only one fireball, and it is always dumb, but faster than you, and always on the screen, and it comes out right away on round 1; no high score displayed; the bonus timer makes you wait until zero, every time; finally, a crab must be hit twice before exiting that screen, otherwise resets itself in the pipes and must then be hit 2 more times. The Sound is pretty annoying (4), OK just barely adequate. The Graphics are fair enough (5) that you can tell what is going on. Of course, the usual 2600 screen limits, like 2 critters, 2 players and 2 wafers at once. The Controls, despite a fast game play, are most excellent (10). I generously scored the Addictiveness as very good (7) - despite it being so limited, and missing many Gameplay elements, for the 2600, it is a fun game to play.

Have Nots: Atari 5200 (33)
This skill is so challenging, it leaves little room for any errors or response time using the joysticks. The Controls are good enough (6) to play, but as is usually the case, they are the worst feature of the version. For some poor programming reason, the beginning of a new round often starts with the last motion you made at the end of the old round - not necessarily the direction you wanted to go. The Gameplay is pretty good (7) and includes a pause, 2 players simultaneously, bonus coins, start levels, 2 types of fireballs, and Slipice. Drawbacks are that there is no head room above to jump over anything on the top level; each coin is delayed instead of coming right out; both types of fireballs look the same; you cannot punch when at the edge of a platform without getting killed; and no difficulty/start options. Another programming setback is a starting delay - where the music chimes (Do, do do, do do do do do do) one should be able to maneuver Mario onto the offensive, before the critters come out. Not so here, where you sit and wait until the critters come out, putting you on the defensive each and every round, for the entire round. This really stinks, and is not the stick's fault. Then, there is an ending delay - instead of the round ending as soon as the last critter is gone, there is an undesirable 1 to 2 second

delay where you could get wasted by a fireball. The Graphics are decent (6), but do little to improve the game. The Sound is very good (7) but could be so much better if ALL of the sound effects and music were included. Too many noises and effect are missing for no reason. Shame on me if this is the result of my 5200 audio chip going bad. The Addictiveness is good enough (6) to bring you back a few more times, but those sticks and the programming make it too frustrating to play. This is definitely not the version to learn this game on, and is the second worst 5200 game that I've reviewed here to date.

Bronze Medal: Atari 8-Bit (36)
Once again, the 8 bit gets a boost over the 5200, due to improved Controls (10), which are perfect. The Gameplay is cool (7) and appears to be identical to the 5200, save for I did not notice a delay at the end of the round, and the pause is a bit easier to use. The Graphics match the 5200 and are good (6). The Sound (6) is good, but seems even more annoying than the 5200. Maybe my 5200 is OK after all, or it IS broken, and I'm missing the annoying sounds that the 8 bit version offers :-) The Addictiveness is pretty good (7), slightly better than the 5200, by virtue of the easier to use controls and pause.

Silver Medal: Atari 7800 (44)
The 7800 has not seen much action in this column, but deserves credit for being a great game. A huge step over those below it, not many games/versions will score 44 and finish second. The Gameplay here is so fully loaded to be considered perfect (10). All the correct features included elsewhere are here and done well, and none of the problems encountered elsewhere. Plus they've included the movement of the floors due to your punch (also seen on 5200 and 8 bit, but not very well). There 2600 unique fireball on/off and starting lives options are not included, but there are 3 start difficulty setting. Just like the arcade, the post-bonus round displaying the coins collected - is only found here - cool. The smart and dumb fireballs are discernable, and work perfectly - but not on any other version. The game speed is a bit fast, but overall has great programming. The Sound is crisp (8), but a bit silly. The music and effects are in place, but the music is annoying, like a corny NES kids game - if you know what I mean. The Graphics are nice (8), but suffer from being squished. Displaying both scores, the high score & logo take up screen space, so everything else suffers - ie, the characters look a bit odd, but this doesn't detract from the action. The Controls are outstanding (9), but could be better if the length of the jumps was more consistent. It could be the Controls interface makes you jump differently, or at different places on the screen, and sometimes you just jump too far and die. The Addictiveness is super (9), but the C64 feels better.

Gold Medal: Commodore 64 (46)
This port is great, and better than the arcade - well only because it is a home version. The Gameplay is outstanding (9), and is only missing a few minor elements: a pause; slippery ice caused by Slipice; and only 1 type of fireball. The Sound and Graphics are both superb (9), the best of the lot, and make the game quite enjoyable. The Controls are perfect (10). The Addictiveness is also fantastic (9), nearly a 10 (I wimped out). I highly recommend this version, provided you can get it on floppy, or via emulation - ie Atari never manufactured it on cart (at least not in the US).

(Come back next month when Atari sweep the medals, as I review the many (OK only 3) faces of Asteroids for the Atari 2600, Atari 7800, and Atari 8-bit. Alan Hewston, who really needs to buy or trade for a 5200 Masterplay Interface, can be reached at Hewston95@stratos.net).

Sites of the Month

Time to nominate two more worthy sites for your enjoyment. Keep sending me your favorite sites and I will keep spotlighting them.

The Dragon's Lair Project
One of the most influential and popular games of the classic era was Dragon's Lair! It was the first laser disc game and started a whole trend towards graphics over gameplay. This site has all the information you could ever want about Dragon's Lair, Space Ace and all the laser disc games. It really is amazing the amount of information they have on this site! If

you are at all interested in this genre of games, you have to check this site out! Here is the URL:

http://www.dragons-lair-project.com/

Atari Age
While the site has been around awhile (formerly known as the Atari 2600 Nexus), it has recently been given a new name and a facelift! Now you can go to Atari Age for all your Atari information!

Besides their constantly updated news on Atari, they also offer a wealth of information! From an updated rarity guide to scans of carts and boxes to information on emulation, it is the all in one site for anything to do with the Atari consoles! You can check out this great site at the following URL:

http://www.atariage.com

Another Classic Game Show!

Not only is there another classic video game show, but this one has completely escaped my attention. Even more surprising than that is the fact that this show is going into its fifth year! It is none other than the California Extreme show and from the sound of it, the show is huge!

Besides this attention getter, there will be a ton of arcade and pinball games to play and a whole lot more. For more information on the show, check out the official website.

Tracs are a sign of severe addiction

by Geoff Voigt

The first 2600 I got had a problem: It came with no working joysticks, Paddles, or any other functional controllers at all. On my *very first* Thrift run, before I even had the 2600 in my possession, I found a single, solitary controller for it. An Atari Trac-Ball, the round button model. (I've never had to clean or maintain it, weird...:/) so for the first week of being a 2600 player and collector, I was enjoying my meager collection of Pac-Man, Donkey Kong, MASH, Berzerk, Space Invaders, Yar's Revenge, Battlezone, Spider-Man, Pitfall, and Defender with this fun but inappropriate device. Because of this experience, I've developed a taste for Berzerk, Yar's, and eventually M-Network Super Challenge Football using the trac-ball, and I'm not against trying out new acquisitions with it. Bobby is Going Home via Trac: almost works, and only try out Pole Position if you want to destroy a good 2600 system. Trust me.

But it's not a big secret or scandal that most of us who collect the Classics also have a modern system or two sharing shelf space with our Old Tyme goodies, and the PlayStation has a fair amount of Classic collections out for it. This is probably why Nyko made the

PlayStation Trac-Ball. After another Classic-loving friend of mine got lucky enough to find some for sale, we were able to get ourselves one.

As one can see, the Nyko's about the size of the Atari and Wico Trac's, but it's weighted like the glorious 5200 Trac-Ball. I've heard that the Nyko controller was also designed by the same person who made the 5200's Trac-Ball, but I don't have any collaborating evidence about that. (help?)

When you plug in your Nyko TB, the PS thinks it's a Mouse, and this led to some initial misunderstandings when I first tried to play with it: you see, on the top of the controller, there are two sets of L and R buttons.

So I hope others can understand that we thought these were L1&2, and R1&2, as seen on a regular PS controller. *THEY'RE NOT!* These are just the old PS Mouse buttons. You also should plug the thing into port 2 on a PS for most games.

CLASSICS THE WAY THEY WERE (MOSTLY) MEANT TO BE PLAYED!

If you're reading this webzine, odds are that you have both Atari Collections. You've probably also learned that Marble Madness, Tempest, Crystal Castles, Super Breakout, and the 'Pede's (Centi and Milli) are lacking that nuance needed for good performance and scores. The Nyko Trac Ball takes care of that problem for some games, and at least reduces the frustration for others. One thing I do like about the Nyko ball is that it doesn't take much to stop it; precision is a wonderful thing.

BORN FOR THE RACETRAC

One of the first things to know about the Atari Collections, the two discs I've put the most mileage on with my Nyko, is that on most of the games, you'll want to reduce the mouse sensitivity. Otherwise Centipede and Millipede go warp speed, and Bentley Bear looks as if he's afflicted with Turret's Syndrome, and jumps clear across the screen. I personally changed Centipede and Millipede to 2, and Crystal Castles to 3.

Atari Collection 1 games:

Tempest: While a spinner would be best, Tempest becomes enjoyable with a trac. It's

better than a regular controller, but not as good as it's meant to be played. Is there a hack out there for a PS Tempest spinner controller?
Centipede: Not much to say, other than great. The Nyko ball's also the same size as the original Arcade Cabinet Centipede.

Super Breakout: a paddle game originally, but I was astonished and stupefied at just how well the Nyko ball does the job. With it, AC2 Super Breakout can be just as good as 2600 with its paddle! Yes! It's that good! You now have a fighting chance at multiple balls, get one up above the wall on your second run and you're as good as gold.

Missile Command: I can play MC with a regular controller. but when you switch to Mouse control, there's only two buttons; L is Alpha, R is Omega. To get Delta, you have to push _both_ buttons. In the later levels, when there's both a Bomber and a Killer Satellite on the screen, a misfire is very, very common. But still, I can play this fine.

Atari Collection 2 games:
Marble Madness is definitely the most improved, by far. With only the regular PS controller, I couldn't go past the second course. Post-Trac I'm now navigating level 4, the Arial course. Control subtlety is restored with this thing, a cornerstone of any good MM playing. One now has a chance to knock the steel ball of the course, and avoid the acid and ball-eaters.

Crystal Castles: Bentley Bear can now run, ladies and gents! It's arcade perfect, and the Gem-Eater delay trick can be executed flawlessly. Now it is possible to play CC with a regular controller, but it's just is missing something without the ball.

Millipede: Like Centipede, fantastic with the trac. You don't get overwhelmed by the crowded action that differentiates this game from its predecessor. This is easilly as good as 2600 Millipede with the Atari Trac. The native arcade code pushes it past. Play this on a big screen for maximum effect.

I was also able to try the trac on Playstation Breakout, which supports Mouse. It was all right, it makes for a new way to play the game, but doesn't blow it open. Still hate those @!$&@ Wolves!

I'm now going to see what Quake and the Sim games can do with this....

(Geoff Voigt is _STLL_ working on the next version of the rec.games.video.classic FAQ. Please be patient. Your call is very important to us. To talk to a real person, push gvoigt@ridgecrest.ca.us otherwise the next available operator will take your call.)

The TI 99/4A "Fairs"

by Jim Krych

They are now very much like reunions of old war veterans. Swapping stories, talking about the latest news, and reminiscing about the old days. But at one time, they were the best way to find about the newest hardware, or software, or at least the latest vaporware. To buy the stuff you didn't, see the prototypes someone got, or create a wish list for the next one.

We're talking about the fairs that many TIers went to and had. And, to a small extent, still do.

They are not uncommon to just the TI crowd, many computer groups have had "official" get togethers. Some small, others quite large. It is indicative of the field that people will come if you organize it and announce it!

The very first fair for the TI 99/4A seems to be the San Francisco one that 99er magazine

organized. It is also written up in other TI histories, that TI itself also contributed large sums of money to ensure the show was a success, and not an embarrassment to TI.

The oldest and the longest running TI fair is the Chicago TI Fair. I remember reading that at one time, nearly 1,500 people showed up at one! Not bad for an "orphaned" machine! It is still held every Fall, in the Chicago area.

They are important for many reasons, one of which to finally see the people you have read about or heard about in person. Or to see that piece of hardware that everyone was talking about. Another reason is that it enabled people to see that things were still being done for the machine.

I personally didn't go to any until after I was out of the U.S. Coast Guard. My first was in 1994, and was the M.U.G. Conference in Lima Ohio. At that time, I gave a couple of seminars, and also showed off the PSRAM prototype of the AMS. And that prototype was more finicky than trying to calibrate an electrometer in it's current range, with a bunch of people dancing by it!

I have often used the fairs to officially announce products. The SuperAMS in 1995, and the VideoTurtle in 1997. Both at the respective M.U.G.'s. It was neat meeting the people who would come from all over. And talking about the latest And seeing what Bruce Harrison had written, and how far along PC99 had come along. The last M.U.G., Multi User Group, conference was in the late spring of 1999, in Brookpark Ohio. Although the awards, the Jim Peterson Awards, are still given out yearly.

Another fair that ran for quite some time was the Fest West shows. Switching between different cities and states. Ironically, the very last Fest West was held at the TI facility in Lubbock Texas, the very same place where TI 99/4A's were produced. And shortly after that fair, TI closed the facility!

The East Coast also had several fairs, including a "Fayuh". TICOF, sorry if that is wrong, was one as well.

Many of the old timers can remember waiting for the news from MYARC and Lou Phillips on the new TI clone! And it was at the Chicago fair that the Geneve 9640 was shown. It was also that a "prototype" TI clone was shown a year earlier. Sometimes you had to take what hardware/software developers said with a grain of salt. As development time was and still is much slower than the rest of the world. And, much vaporware was pushed. But, not too atypical of the computer world as a whole. But, I have known of a certain person who was banned from a M.U.G., for having taken people's money and not delivered the product.

Europe also has had fairs, and often I would read about Americans who went over and the things they saw. The Germans have typically come up with some really neat products, but in a weird cross-system parallel with the Atari 16/32 computer systems, getting them here to the states is darn near impossible.

Because there are now so very few TI only fairs left, I would heartily recommend to the TIers to go to the multi system fairs and classic shows that are being organized. Not to toot our own horn, with the CCAG 2001 coming up very soon, but to show the flag and such. You would be surprised how many people, retrogamers included, who would love the spare carts you have to sell, and any PEB's with peripherals. Nostalgia, and everything about the 80's is hot goings on right now, and it would be a great way to meet new faces.

As I finish writing this, my National Guard unit is getting ready to go to San Diego! I am hoping to meet some long time friends out there, including the VideoTurtle boys! Otherwise, it's kinda hard to meet the friends from California! Thanks again to you folks who keep on writing me. Once I am finished with these articles, I would like to be able to do interviews with the movers and shakers, past and present.

("Hi, my name is Jim W. Krych. I am a 31 year old technician, with an Electronics Diploma and a soon-to-be finished Computer Programming and Operations Diploma. I am currently

employed at the finest maker of electrometers/nanovoltmeters/etc., and my particular product line that I work on is the Source Measure Unit(SMU) models 236,237, and 238. I have a 21 month old son, his name is Treyton. I enjoy retrogaming and things that go with that. :) My email address: jwkrych@n2net.net)

Letters to the Editor

The virtual mailbag is once more opened and inside we find some more letters. Keep the coming and I will keep answering them.

You talk about all these great games, but you don't have any of them on your site to play, why? signed I wanna play games!

I get about 100 emails a month asking for this game or that game. While I would like to put all the classic games on my site for you to download, I neither have the room to put all of them, nor do I have the bandwidth on the site to handle it. Maybe one day I will get a monster sized site (not that the 300 meg of space I have now is small), with no restrictions on what you put or how much bandwidth it takes. Until then, you need to check out the many great sites that host this stuff. Any decent search engine should be able to yield you a multitude of sites.

I have been reading about all the American game shows (Phillyclassic, CGE, CCAG, etc...) in your newsletter, but there is no mention of any shows outside of the USA. Are there any you are aware of? signed Non-US Classic Game Fan

While I am sure there are shows and meetings outside of the USA, I have not had anyone contact me about any. If anyone out there knows of a show or is planning one, email me the information and I will gladly display it. This is a worldwide newsletter, not just a USA only. We have had writers from different countries as well as readers from all over the planet. I have received emails from at least 50 different countries, so classic gaming is a world wide hobby!

While I enjoy your online newsletter, are there any print newsletters that deal with classic games? Thanks! signed Looking for Portable Classic Game News

You can print off Retrogaming Times and take it with you! Anyway, there are a number of print magazines and newsletters that deal with classic video games. Here are a few that I am aware of:

Classic Gamer Magazine-Great magazine and well worth the low price!
Digital Press-Another wonderful publication, this time in newsletter format.
2600 Connection-This one as the name implies, deals with the Atari 2600.
Syzygy Magazine-While I have not read an issue of this, I have heard good things about it.

Conclusion

For you keeping score at home, this issue came out a day early. That is due to a weekend outing that I had planned, so I made sure to get it done early. I did not want another late issue. Check back next month as we will look at some of the other online newsletters. If you do an online newsletter that deals with classic games, be it carts, computers, arcade or emulation, or if you know of one, then email me and I will make sure to mention it!

Also, there will be a new issue of Bit Age Times this month! Look for it on the 30th of the month. If you want to submit an article, you have until the 27th of the month to submit it. Thanks and may your flea markets and garage sales yield treasure troves of games for you!

-Tom Zjaba

(This issue was done while listening to sappy love songs like Hall & Oates: She's Gone, Elvis Costello: Allison and 38 Special: Second Chance. What can I say, I am a romantic at

heart.)