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Eyeball Benders

by Alan Hewston

Remember these from past issues?

I had a lot of fun and should have done more, but I figured that I was eating up too much bandwidth. Here's just a few, not too hard and they are all the same theme.

Hint: Once you figure one out, you pretty much will get all the others.

Look for the answers at the end of the issue.

Hmmmn. I wonder if I should do some really hard ones and not give the answers. Nah. Tom would get flooded with email complaints.

Eyeball #1

Eyeball #2

Eyeball #3

Eyeball #4

Eyeball #5

Eyeball #6

That's it. This time (for a change), the answers will be a picture without any deception.

Alan can be reached at Hewston95ATNOSPAMstratos.net. He edited these while listening to "Can't take my eyes off of you". If you want the "Retrogaming Times" to continue, please drop him a line of encouragement, as Adam, Tonks and Alan may try to keep the magazine going . .. with Tom's blessing of course.

Letters to the Editor

I thought about putting in some of the nice letters that people sent thanking me for all the issues and wishing me luck, but whats the fun in that? Instead, I will give you more of the strange and goofy letters that I have received. Consider it one last helping of the bizarre.

Pacman and Ms. Pacman are just well...heads. How did they create Jr. Pacman?

Let's just say that those power pellets are more powerful than you ever imagined.

My friend told me that the name Coleco was the name of the person who found the company. Is this true as it would be a strange last name.

You think that is a strange last name, check out mine. Actually Coleco is short for the Connecticut Leather Company. And before someone asks, Sega is short for Service Games.

What did you think of the new Pitfall game? You used to review all the remakes but I have not seen that one.

I tried a demo disk of it and to be honest, I was not impressed. Played like a clone of Crash Bandicoot and I was not a big fan of that game.

When listing the songs that you listened to when writing the newsletter, why are you not listening to Pacman Fever or another video game song?

I did listen to it in the early days and still pull it out from time to time. But even a video game fanatic can only listen to it so many times before you want to hear something else.

You have kids but are they video game fans or do they think their dad is weird?

You cannot live in our house and not like video games. Like the Wagaman residence, video games are a staple of life. My oldest son, Alex has autism so he does not play too many video games. About the only one that he really liked is Mario 64. He is more into playing music on the computer very loudly and watching his large collection of Disney

DVDs and VHS tapes. My wife is big into RPGs and puzzle games. I have twin boys that are 8 years old and one of them, Joshua is a video game fanatic. He loves just about any Gamecube game and right now is creating a ton of pinball tables with Visual Pinball. His twin brother, Justin is big into roller coaster games like Roller Coaster Tycoon and Coaster Works. And we all enjoy a good game of Bomberman or Ooga Booga on the Dreamcast. Myself, I mostly play MAME, Activision Anthology, Atari 80, Intellivision Lives and Visual Pinball with a dose of Morrowind to add flavoring.

Interview with Classic Games Programmer Robert C. McNally

by Alan Hewston

First off, I'd like to thank Peter McDuff from the Star Trek fan club ("TrekPulse.com") for giving me feedback on the Many Faces of "Star Trek: Strategic Operations Simulator". Peter confirmed that there was indeed an Apple][version, and that its programmer has his own web site. This of course led me to Robert.

Despite having just completed an interview for that very same Star Trek fan club, Robert was gracious enough to do an interview for us Retrogamers. Robert was confident that he'd have much to tell us and he did. Only bad news is that there was too much to include here in the Retrogaming Times. So we've cut it down and focus on Robert's stories about the Apple //, Sega, Activision and his Apple // programming of "Ghostbusters" & "Star Trek: SOS". The director's cut (full interview) will still be available at Robert's web site. Read about his early computer experiences, visits to TV studios for "Tic-Tac-Dough" and "Buck Rogers" and much more at:

http://www.dangerousgames.com/~ironwolf/writings/retro.html

Tell us about your earliest computer and video game experiences, where you grew up, what was the first computer that you used at home, school, work etc.

I was born in Hollywood, CA in 1965, and at age 8 my family moved to Granada Hills, in the San Fernando Valley (of "Valley Girl" fame). I think my first contact with a computer came in 1976 when I was in 7th grade. My school had a mysterious room with an old minicomputer in it (I don't remember the make or model, only that it was about the size of a refrigerator.) I never took the class, but managed to spend a little time in the room watching older kids load programs from paper tape and laboriously enter programs on the teletype. I was fascinated, but my interest never took root, because as I said, I hated school, and math was my most-hated subject. Only older kids who were good at math got to study on that machine.

Then one day in 1977 I had made a slight detour on my usual route home from school, and discovered Rainbow Computing. The front of the tiny computer store featured a rack of computer mags like "Creative Computing" & "ROM Magazine". On a table at the back of the store sat a stylish plastic case with an integrated keyboard hooked up to a color television and a cassette player-- The Apple][. And it played games! I basically became a tolerated daily nuisance to the store entrepreneurs Gene Sprouse and Glenn Dollar. My parents, who couldn't afford to purchase a computer at that time, stopped expecting me home before the store closed. I made myself useful in the store by copying the cassette tapes on which Apple][programs were distributed, and Gene and Glenn paid me in computer magazines that I took home and absorbed. Eventually my parents scraped together enough money to buy an Apple //+ (which had an amazing 48K of RAM instead of the original 4K, and by that time floppy drives were even available!

While hanging out at Rainbow Computing, I met Gary J. Shannon, who is the brother of Sargon author Kathe Spracklen, and he became something of a mentor to me. Through little programs he wrote that did amazingly cool things in assembly language, Gary showed me why I should be interested in going deeper into the machine. Gary later moved to San Diego to work for arcade game manufacturer Gremlin, which was later bought by

Sega. He was my introduction to Sega where I was hired as a programmer.

So when did you first want to be a computer programmer, or video game designer?

Pretty much from the time I played my first computer game.

Were you mostly self-taught, or via magazines and books, and did you learn much from classes?

Mostly self-taught. Most of my early experience was acquired by reading programming guides, studying others' code, and tons of experimentation. As time has gone on I've read many more academic books on the subject. The primary skill that got me started was 6502 assembly programming on the Apple][.

After becoming proficient at using an Apple][, what other computers did you use?

The 8-bit computers and game systems that I have programmed primarily include the Apple // and its descendants, the Atari 400/800, the Atari 2600, and the Commodore 64.

What age were you when you first wrote/published a computer/video game for any income and for whom?

I was around 14 when “Camera Obscura,” was published by Programma International. They were the original "cassette in a bag" software publishing company. But I don’t recall whether I actually *made* any money on it.

Gary Shannon helped get you a programming job at Sega. What was your first task?

I was hired for my ability to program 6502 assembly. Mostly I studied techniques for programming the 2600, and I started designing a stunt-car game. But I was moved to the Apple // before that game was very far along.

Tell us about getting the opportunity to program the Apple // version of “Star Trek: SOS” and did anyone else contribute?

The move actually came as a relief to me, as I found the Atari 2600 environment terribly restrictive when compared to the relatively roomy Apple //. I did all the programming. One of Sega's artists did the shapes that appear in the lower viewer. I especially like how he drew the star base so it appears to be rotating as it comes closer -- in the coin-op the angle is static. I did all the other art and sound, including the front page Star Trek logo.

Are you a Star Trek fan, and did you play the arcade game “Star Trek: SOS” while making the Apple // version?

Moderately. I enjoyed watching Star Trek as a kid, played the Star Fleet Battles board game of years ago, and watched the first few seasons of ST:TNG. I've seen most of the Star Trek movies.

I played the arcade version tons. I essentially didn't "convert" the game code so much as I "replicated" the coin-op play as much as possible on the Apple //.

Screen shots of Apple][“Star Trek: SOS” courtesy of Robert

Tell us about the Star Trek: SOS arcade programmer.

When I was hired at Sega/Gremlin, the youngest engineer working there was Sam Palahnuk, who had designed and co-developed the original coin-op “Star Trek: SOS” in his early 20s. Sam was the youngest programmer Sega had hired to date until I was hired at age 17. I received quite a bit of good-natured ribbing for it. Sam and I subsequently became long-time friends.

I tested your memory about Nomad. What can you tell us about this enemy in “Star Trek: SOS”?

Nomad has what appears at first to be a very evasive behavior, but actually it simply flies the same direction as the Enterprise but at twice the speed. The wrap-around nature of the board means that it’s always on the board somewhere, though. The trick is to fly directly away from Nomad, and it will fly right up to you. Stop before it touches you (or it will drain your shields,) and turn around and shoot it. Its behavior is actually quite stupid.

Thanks. Now I’m sure to improve my score a little bit. Do you have any of the original materials from the game, any prototype versions, earlier versions, potentially better versions? The final production box, artwork, manual, or floppy disk?

I have the front panel of a box, which I cut out and had displayed in a picture frame for a number of years. I have a manual, which is a single sheet that measures 19" wide by 10" high unfolded, printed on both sides in two colors (red and dark blue). Alas, I currently have no scans of these materials, and do not have a scanner readily available.

What can you tell us about the Apple][version and the speech from the arcade game?

As I recall the coin-op version had a voice that introduced each level with "Entering Sector 3" or some sort, and also warned of low resources. But it didn't add much to the gameplay and there was no expectation that the Apple // version would talk, so I didn't try to add that in.

How long did it take to write the code and what machine(s) did you use at SEGA?

It took seven or eight months, I believe. I wrote Star Trek on an Apple // (I think it was a //e) that Sega provided in their offices.

OK, as I’m typing - it is Easter weekend, so tell us about your Easter egg?

Sega was owned by Paramount Pictures at that time, and there was a big push to do games based on Paramount properties, including Star Trek. Near the completion of SOS I felt rightfully proud of how it had turned out. While not as attractive as the arcade version, it faithfully reproduced the gameplay and I was pretty happy with it overall. To celebrate, I decided to put in an easter egg that would provide me with credit (which was against Sega policy). I programmed it such that if, during gameplay, the user blindly typed "Who programmed this game?" It would display "ROBERT MCNALLY" at the bottom of the screen for 30 seconds. Sadly, I made the mistake of showing the easter egg to a couple of colleagues who I thought I could trust, and one of them reported my escapade to my supervisor, who made me disable the code. The release version does NOT have this code, and contains no other easter eggs.

Did you feel cheated by Management's action? How do you feel now that giving full credit is standard practice?

Well, I understood that not giving credit was company policy, so I suppose I didn't feel cheated. If anything, I was trying to cheat them by flouting their policy and putting in an easter egg. At the same time, I felt that they had good reasons to give programmers credit, and were not doing so to their own detriment. I felt vindicated that giving credit became the norm.

I must admit that we (I) could not confirm the existence of an Apple // version of "Star Trek: SOS". We knew there were the generic Trek games, but not the arcade game SOS until we heard about your site. Thanks for sharing with us.

I wonder if the low-key nature of the Apple retro gaming community is basically because although the Apple // was the first of its generation, it didn't turn out to be one of the better overall game machines. Lack of sprite hardware, limited color palette, lack of character-mapped graphics, lack of scrolling hardware, and lack of multi-voice audio hardware really hampered the Apple // play experience. I loved my Apple // days, but when I started working on the Atari 400/800, I realized how much better those machines were for playing games.

Screen shots of Apple]["Ghostbusters" courtesy of Robert

Tell us about Activision and "Ghostbusters", your next 8 bit programming task on the Apple][?

I don't recall who my introduction to Activision was, but I worked under a producer named Brad Fregger. I did not work on anything else for Activision.

I vividly recall being asked by Brad to bid on the Ghostbusters project, and after agonizing about it for a couple days, calling him back. "So, how much do you want for the Ghostbusters project?" Brad asked.

Well, I've thought about it a lot and I'd like to ask for seven thousand," I said cautiously.

Immediately Brad shot back, "That's not enough."

"What?" I choked.

"I said that's not enough. I'll give you fifteen."

Of course I accepted. And while looking back on the exchange I realize that even back then $15K was probably at the low end of the price range for such work, I felt quite motivated to get the job done well and on time. Essentially we both ended up feeling like we got a good deal, so I have no regrets.

Were you the only programmer for the Apple // version of Ghostbusters?

I was the only programmer, and I did the graphics and sound, including the speech.

Did you play the original version much or look at the code?

CODE: I almost never looked at the original code. I re-wrote the program from scratch to function as much as possible like the original, and only queried the original programmer a couple times when I wasn't quite clear how it should act under certain circumstances. I found a two-voice music synthesis package for the Apple // and reverse-engineered it to figure out how it worked. My own version included some improvements, including the ability to sync the lyrics. The speech was not as good as I wanted it to be, but the algorithms to encode and decode it were my own. The voice in the game is my own.

GRAPHICS: I did all the art based on the C-64 version, drawing it on graph paper and then entering tables by mentally converting the dots on the paper into hex. The Apple // had a non-square aspect ratio, so re-doing the art was the only way to get things to look right, and also to line up on byte boundaries.

SOUND: I arranged the musical score myself and typed the music and lyrics in as hex tables.

Why is there only speech at the opening credits in "Ghostbusters", and what about the music?

There is no other speech as I didn't have the RAM to include that in the Apple // version, so I just had a "squish" sound instead of “He slimed me!” speech sequence the C-64 had. Because the C-64 version had independent voice synthesis and timed interrupts, it could play music during the entire gameplay. The Apple // just didn’t have that capability.

The Apple][version of Ghostbusters has disk access throughout the game. Was there any way to avoid this? Do you recall how close you were to not having repeated disk loads?

I don't recall exactly, but I do remember that having separate overlays for each scene made things a lot simpler. Frankly, I never worried about those factors. But I'm sure I would have avoided burning the disk if I felt I had a good approach to it. I believe minimum RAM requirements were just too constricting, but I also had a lot of time pressure to work under, so I don't recall having a lot of time to work out a better way.

Did you meet the game designer for Ghostbusters, David Crane? Have you ever met or worked with him later or since?

I visited Activision when David was there, I think, but I don't recall meeting him, and although Ghostbusters bore his credit, I really don't recall him having anything to do directly with the Apple

version. I have never met him since.

What was your favorite system to program for between the Apple][, Atari 400/800 &

Commodore 64?

Well, you always have fond memories of your first. I recall my Apple // days as some of the best. But the Atari 400/800 was a very exciting platform, as its graphics and sound capabilities were far beyond the Apple's. The Commodore programming I did was mostly graphics utilities for in-house artists at Sega, and the platform never really grew on me.

Tell us about your gaming interests - types of games that you like?

This is easier answered by listing the genres I don't particularly care for: Fighting games (other than “Karate Champ”, which was cool), Driving games (Unless they are really off-the-wall, like “Spy Hunter” or “Stun Runner”), Sports games (I have never been a fan of team sports. My grandfather was a golf fan, so for that reason I kind of enjoyed working on “PGA Tour Golf”.)

Give us your top 10 favorite computer and video games from the 80’s?

Like many, I spent endless hours at my local arcades playing the best games the 80s had to offer. Cutting my original list to 10 was tough, but here goes... (alphabetical order)

Beneath Apple Manor - First Apple game I saw hooked up to a coin slot!

Castle Wolfenstein - The 2-D forerunner of today's 3-D FPS

Crazy Climber - Blisters on the knuckles of both hands!

Lemmings - Brilliant concept, perfectly executed

Marble Madness - Loved the attention to detail

Mario Bros. - Deceptively friendly- play it 2-player competitively and it rocks!

Populous - The first "god game"

Star Raiders - Flawless

Tempest - The best color vector game ever

Tetris - Addiction reduced to its simplest terms

No doubt you played games throughout this era as your resume suggests. Did it just become a job at some point, or did you make an effort to remain working in the games industry?

Oh, games are in my blood alright. It was never "just a job" for me, it has always been a labor of love. I've always loved being able to write computer programs that average people can understand and enjoy, and games are at the pinnacle of that concept.

Tell us about your family, wife, any children and your brothers.

I have been married to my wife Rebecca for almost 10 years and have a 3-year old son, Bevan. I also have two younger brothers, both of whom are involved in the computer games industry. Steven is a video and computer game designer and Michael, who has worked for the past 3 years on developing artificial intelligence technology for games. He has just accepted an offer to work at Google!

Do you hope to share your games, and those from your generation with your son?

Definitely. They're part of my history. In particular my friend and collaborator Joe Pearce has revived Inherit the Earth for Windows and Mac (http://www.wyrmkeep.com), and I'm looking forward to sharing it with my 3 year old when he's just a little older.

Were you aware of the Retrogaming Scene and how much gamers are still enjoying

these games and systems 20 years later?

Although I'm not into the scene much, I'm well aware of it, and am very happy to see the old systems and games being enjoyed.

Do you currently have any emulators or old systems from back then?

I'm a MAME fan, and still visit some of my favorite coin-op ROMs from time to time. I used an Apple // emulator to get screen shots of some of my old projects for my web site. Sadly, I no longer have any of my old hardware. It just never seemed like a priority to preserve it. I actually did preserve the case from my family's original Apple][for many years, intending to make an herb planter out of it. When I moved out of my last place I forgot to take it with me and the

landlord threw it out thinking I had abandoned it. *sigh*

After working on titles like, "Star Trek", "Ghostbusters", "Mr. Robot & His Robot Factory", "Quintette", "Ebonstar", "The Jetsons", "PGA Tour Golf" and a few others, did you get pulled away from programming games, and wished you could have done more?

My interests have grown to include areas outside of games as such, but I would still like to create more games (or game-like projects) at some point.

Your resume shows that you continued to work on some game projects, but not just games. Is it just the way the cards fell, or because you did not stay at one company long, or with one platform long?

I think that a big part of it is that my interests are all over the place, and that I grow restless when I feel like I'm doing the same thing over and over again. I never want to live the same day twice.

This seems to have made you very well rounded (programming skills in multiple languages, multiple systems and operating systems, controllers, graphics, production, edutainment, productivity etc.). Looks like you're a 'jack of all trades'. Has this helped you to continue to write your own ticket in terms of what companies, or what projects you'd like to work on?

Of course the flip-side to the "Jack of all trades..." saying is "...and a master of none." But I think in all the time and experience I've had, I have mastered one fundamental and fairly rare skill: communicating successfully with, and facilitating communication between, creative, technical, and business interests. I speak all three "languages" fluently, and enjoy being the bridge between parties that often must work together, but have intrinsically conflicting ideals and goals. The thing that keeps this skill lively and honed for me is that I don't set myself in a category apart from artists, programmers or business people -- I actually practice all three disciplines on an ongoing basis -- I am an artist, an engineer, and a businessperson. My work in games really got me moving in this direction, as game development is a quintessentially interdisciplinary process.

Tell us about your game playing and work experience in the next generation of computers – the MAC, Amiga, Atari ST, PC and today?

Rainbow Computing was one of the first stores to offer the Apple Lisa, the forerunner of the Macintosh. Of course I played with it extensively (I still have a Lisa paperweight on my desk.) I admired its ground-breaking approach to user interface, but at $10K I would never buy one. When the Macintosh appeared in 1984 I knew this was the wave of the future, and bought my first Mac, the 512K model, in 1985. The only viable development language for the Mac at that time was 68000 assembly, so that was what I mastered first, and my first commercial Macintosh product was a port of the C-64 planetarium package "Sky Travel". Later I moved to programming in C.

In retrospect I think that my progression through languages made a lot of sense-- Basic to

get my feet wet, 6502 assembly to learn how to get performance out of a system, then 68000 assembly to understand the next-generation processor architecture, and then C as a sort of compact shorthand for assembly. Eventually of course I learned C++, Java, and a host of other languages as well.

The Macintosh became my "home" system. I use it for everything I can, and I also run Mac and Linux servers in my office. I have a PC laptop I use when I must. Even though the PC gaming world has always been much more robust than the Mac gaming world, I just can't stomach using Windows as my every day operating system. Elegance and aesthetics mean a lot to me, and the Mac has it all over Windows in those areas. The Mac took a homogenous approach to its media hardware (you pretty much used whatever Apple provided, and it "just worked" trouble free, and programmers had to change very little as the Mac hardware advanced) and the PC took a rather heterogeneous approach (you picked from the plethora of video and sound cards available and had endless compatibility issues, but when it worked, it worked well, especially for games). The Amiga was a great games and multimedia machine in its day, but it's architecture was closely tied to its generation of hardware, and the state of the art just ended up passing it by.

What are you currently working on and where do you see your career going in the future?

For the past couple years my big project has not been a game, but a toy. PixelBlocks were invented by Jay Simmons over 15 years ago. In 2001, Jay offered me the opportunity to bring PixelBlocks to market. I accepted and brought together four other talented partners to start PixelBlocks LLC. I also developed the company web site. PixelBlocks launched in October 2003, and have received a wonderful response.

http://www.pixelblocks.com

The best way to stay current on what I'm involved with is to check out my personal web site. I've had a web presence since 1995, and I always add links to ventures I'm closely involved with to the link bars featured on every page.

http://www.dangerousgames.com/~ironwolf/

I'm very happy that retrogaming will always be there when I feel like walking down memory lane. It always startles me how much I remember when I browse web sites about, and play games from, that brief but golden age.

Again, many thanks for your time.

Thanks for the opportunity to "unpack" a lot of my personal/professional history-- I've really enjoyed it. Thanks to the following sites for helping jog my memory:

The Killer List of Video Games: www.klov.com

The Giant List of Classic Game Programmers: http://dadgum.com/giantlist/list.html

[I'm listed in the Giant List as McNally, Bob, even though I always go by Robert.]

Robert C McNally can be reached at: ironwolfNO@SPAMdangerousgames.com

http://www.dangerousgames.com/~ironwolf.html

Alan Hewston can be reached at hewston95NO@SPAMstratos.net

(Robert McNally and his lovely family)

New Forbidden Forest

Sometimes you stumble across something that you did not even think existed. While at a retail store, I came across a collection of games from a company called Cosmi. One of them was Forbidden Forest. I read the back and sound like the original. But it also came with a $20.00 price tag and I was not going to pay that for the chance it was a remake of the beloved Commodore 64 game. Well, I went online and found out it was remake of the original. And I also found that I could get half the collection for a much lower price on ebay. The one at the retail store was 20 programs with half being arcade games and half being puzzle games. I only really wanted Forbidden Forest. The one on ebay only had the 10 arcade games with Forbidden Forest and I picked it up for $3.00 plus shipping. Much better than the $20.00 retail price. Now onto a review of the game.

This version of Forbidden Forest keeps the spirit of the original alive. The basic game is the same with you going through the Forbidden Forest trying to kill all the unfriendly creatures that populate the woods. But this time you are actually moving through the forest. You are still armed with a bow and arrow and have to load the bow like before. The creatures still come after you and many of your favorites are back like the spider and dragon. But this time there are more creatures and they are alot harder to kill. Some take multiple hits and this time they can move around you. The game is very similar to a Tomb Raider as it is the same view. You do switch to a first person angle when you are shooting at the monsters.

The game offers alot of stuff the original did not. There are over 100 levels, items you can pick up and different weather patterns. The game is pretty involved for a remake of a game that most people have never heard of. While the graphics are quite nice, they are not exactly amazing. But I found the game to be quite addictive, much like the original. But enough of talking about this game, for the low price it is a no brainer. If you like the original, you should like this one as it is better than the Forbidden Forest sequel aptly titled Forbidden Forest II. It also has the original game included, so you can enjoy the new or the classic for one very low price (shop around, you should find it pretty cheap, I did). Here are some links for you to read more about it and see some screenshots:

http://www.cosmi.com/html/product%20pages/entertainment/forbidden_forest.htm

The official Cosmi website.

http://www.webfootgames.com/catalog/forest.htm

The website of the programmers with some nice screenshots.

http://www.monroeworld.com/forbiddenforest/main.htm

Here is the unofficial website for the original game. The memories!

Billy the Block - Still Part of the Retrogaming Scene

by Tim Roach & Alan Hewston

Billy the Block, as Tom calls our beloved hero from the Atari 2600 game "Adventure" is still part of the Retrogaming scene. Billy will return to action in the upcoming Atariage.com homebrew "Adventure] [", by Ron "Cafeman" Lloyd. Besides this new Atari 5200 game, Billy has not landed many good paying jobs, and he's had some hard times over the years. The picture above is Billy finding ways to pay the bills - using himself as a 3-D billboard to advertise for classic games.

Alan came up with “Billy in 3-D” idea and Tim Roach brought it to fruition. First pulling in some classic game system/computer logos, then modifying them to work with the 3-D CAD graphics packages. A final touch using yet another graphics tool to give Billy some aging (texture). Tom thinks that the 3-D Billy might make a good mascot for the possible continuation of the newsletter. That is, staff Writers Adam King & Alan Hewston will try to keep the “Retrogaming Times” going, and Tom has given us his blessing, but we have not settled on the revised name as yet. The frontrunner is the "Retrogaming Monthly". We'll plan to continue regular features, like the "Many Faces of", the "Commercial Vault", "Vic 20 Reviews by Tonks", 8 Bit Face Off” etc.

Stay tuned for more about a possible continuation of this newsletter, but probably with a 1 month delay. If you have any feedback on keeping this newsletter/magazine alive, and/or would like to see “Billy the Block” above be the new mascot, contact Alan at hewston95NOSP@AMstratos.net

Commodore 64 Top Ten Carts

by Matt Allen

So, it's the last issue of Retrogaming Times. Time for one last article about the wonder computer C64 me thinks. Question is, what subject to write about? Well collecting is always in, so we can focus on that. And cartridges are always cool, and in the C64's case, an oft-overlooked part of the games inventory. So what better way to promote the two by writing something about must-have cartridges? So for all the folks out there reading this, here's the guide to 10 carts you should consider picking up. Fortunately there are very few compatibility problems between regions, so any of these should work fine on NTSC or PAL machines. So in no particular order here...

Wizard of Wor (Commodore)

Admittedly whilst Commodore released more cartridges by far than any other manufacturer, most of them were not that great. This was especially noticeable when it came to the arcade conversions, where all of them suffered from being early releases and not capturing the essence and feel of the original. Except this one. It looks and sounds like the arcade for starters, even more so once a Magic Voice Speech module is attached to the computer. Commodore programmed some support within a few games for the device, and this happens to be one of them. All the features are present, including 2-player mode and the ability to shoot the other participant. Even better, because it is a Commodore cart, it isn't that hard to track down either.

Rating: 9/10 Rarity: 3/10

DragonsDen (Commodore)
Wizard of Wor isn't the only Commodore produced cartridge worthy of purchase. Andy Finkel wrote the conversion of Lazarian for the machine, and whilst competent, it wasn't that good overall. DragonsDen is a much better game that strangely takes a lot of inspiration from said arcade title. The parallels between corresponding stages of each game can't be a coincidence, indeed Commodore probably got Finkel to write this clone before they got the license to do the real conversion. It looks a lot nicer, and plays a hell of a lot better however. Take your knight and flying horse and defeat the dragons invading the land. A solid difficulty and limited opportunities to continue make this game quite the challenge.

Rating: 8/10 Rarity: 3/10

Gyruss (Parker Brothers)
Most of the arcade conversions available on cartridge aren't actually that bad. Not poor, but also not of the high standard required and set to be considered great or classic. Thankfully one of my favourite coin-ops also has a top-notch conversion available on the C64. Bringing all the goodness of the 360 degree action to the small screen is no small feat, especially considering the programming limitations at the time and the number of enemies flying about at once. Even the bonus stages are faithful in their formation and AI. True, it is somewhat easier than the arcade parent, but this just means you get to enjoy it longer. The cartridge comes at a slight premium however and you may have to pay a bit more than expected to get it than the rarity suggests.

Rating: 9/10 Rarity: 3/10

Last Ninja Remix (System 3)
What do you get when you take the best entry in the series (Last Ninja 2), improve the graphics a bit more over the existing brilliance, add an intro sequence, remix the music and release it on cart primarily for the new C64GS owners? This entry in the top 10 list, that's what. Set in New York, your task once again is to track down and defeat your enemy Kunitoki. Isometric full coloured 3D graphics combined with a thumping soundtrack (though not quite as good as the original score) and some tricky puzzles to solve (including building your own weapons) make for a classic release. System 3 also improved the scoring and time functions so you can track how well and how quickly you can complete the game.

Rating: 9/10 Rarity: 5/10

Myth (System 3)
Arguably the best cartridge available for the C64. Originally released on tape/disk, it was repackaged with extra presentation and the instant loading of the cartridge format. Not every kid gets to be a hero, now you have the chance to battle through time against demons and gods to stop the end of the universe. Four massive loads, plenty of puzzles

and tricks, and enough arcade action to satisfy any gamer. Add on top some trademark System 3 quality graphics and sound and there is not a single weak point about the program. Unless you happen to be a gaming wimp and can't take the fairly sizeable difficulty curve present. Due to demand and the fairly low sales, expect this to set you back a little bit on eBay etc when purchasing.

Rating: 9/10 Rarity: 6/10

Diamond Mine (Roklan)
And now for a game and a company many people probably have never heard about. Despite their relative obscurity in the minds of most games players (though Atari computer owners may well have heard of them more than most), Roklan actually released some decent games for the C64. Best of the lot is probably this little gem (hah hah). You have to dig through the soil, collect diamonds for processing and avoid or shoot the nasties roaming about. You get more points for delivering and collecting larger numbers of gems at the same time, but as they trail behind you in formation, make it more likely for the nasties to "steal" them as you explore. Balance and risk, a classic gaming trait. If anything, try it out in emulation first as it's hard to find, even on eBay.

Rating: 8/10 Rarity: 6/10

Battle Command (Ocean)
Originally released on the Amiga, the game was then successfully and impressively converted to the C64. A criticism of the cartridge format was that games often didn't actually take advantage of it properly; this happens to be one case where it does. Command your battle tank in eight challenging missions, taking out enemy facilities and generally causing trouble in a Battlezone like way. People used to point that the C64 has a weak point doing vector graphics, either line or filled-in. This game happens to show that filled in work can move smoothly and quickly (at least a hell of a lot faster than Freescape!) when needed. Backing this up is a complex, but very arcade orientated mission structure and control scheme, making it easy to get into but very hard to complete.

Rating: 8/10 Rarity: 4/10

Navy SEALS (Ocean)
Or a demonstration in not only making a great game from a film license, but making one from a crappy film license at that. The game structure follows the film somewhat; first part has you disarming the Stinger missiles stolen by the terrorists, and then there is the escape to the waiting sub. What sets this apart is that the game is highly tactical for an arcade platform shooter, requiring some pinpoint accuracy and on-the-fly decision making. Oh and did I mention the one-hit kills? Whilst your men can survive some falls, one bullet puts them out of action and with only 5 men in the team, you can quickly find yourself in trouble. It isn't impossible to complete, but it is highly rewarding, superb to look at and listen to, with some impeccable presentation to boot.

Rating: 8/10 Rarity: 3/10

Moon Patrol (Atarisoft)
Well there had to be one game from the Atari stables in the list somewhere. For whatever reason, this conversion over the 11 others available for the C64 seems to stand out. Sure it's a little rough and ready around the edges, with some slightly blocky graphics and dismal sound effects, but there are two issues massively in its favour. Firstly it is pretty much spot on accuracy wise when it comes to the arcade machine. All stages are present and seemingly correct in their hair pulling frustration. Secondly it is just fun to play. Always a rather important part of the games playing experience, and one sadly many producers seem to overlook nowadays. It is also probably the easiest to find of the ten carts here, so

no worries about missing out there.

Rating: 7/10 Rarity: 2/10

Powerplay (Disc Company)
It's actually a compilation of 3 Microprose (at the time) owned games. The newer technology allowed cartridges to go over and above the old 16k limit and most took advantage of this. The fact this cart contains three classic games in Rick Dangerous, Microprose Soccer and Stunt Car Racer might have something to do with its desirability and value. Rick Dangerous is Core pre-Tomb Raider, and a great pastiche of Indiana Jones and puzzle solving. Microprose Soccer is Sensible Software personified with a brilliant overhead perspective football game. And Stunt Car Racer is a definitive early 3D racer with plenty of bite, challenge and breath-taking jumps. If you haven't got any of these already, then what are you waiting for?!

Rating: 9/10 Rarity: 5/10

Video Game Therapy

One last time we will sit in on a session of Video Game Therapy with Dr. I. N. Sane. Listen in as he talks to Mappy about some moral dilemmas.

Dr. Sane - Tell me Mappy, what is bothering you?

Mappy - Well Doc, I have been a police mouse and I have been busting these cats who steal goods. And this was fine as I kept finding these houses full of stolen merchandise. But then something happened that changed my whole perspective of my job.

Dr. Sane - What happened that changed your perspective?

Mappy - Some kids were playing Mappy and one of the kids said to the other "I don't think that Mappy is really the good guy. I think he is the crook and the cats are trying to stop him from stealing all the stuff."

Dr. Sane - And this disturbed you?

Mappy - Yeah Doc. I always thought I was the good guy, but when I sat and thought about it that night, he had a point. I am the one breaking into their house and taking their stuff. I never actually arrest anyone, instead I am chased by the so called crooks.

Dr. Sane - That is interesting. How does it make you feel?

Mappy - I am not sure Doc. I am wearing a police uniform and I am the star of the game, but maybe it is a setup. Maybe I have been tricked into thinking I am breaking up a crime ring, only to be the criminal. It is enough to make me question my existence.

Dr. Sane - Have you ever talked to your boss or supervisor?

Mappy - I have never met him or her for that matter. I just keep going to these houses and taking all the possessions. I never questioned what I did before, but now I do not know. I need help Doc.

Dr. Sane - We will schedule some tests for you and try to have a group session with the cats. We will see if we can get to the root of this problem.

The Lost Faces of...Q*bert

by Alan Hewston

This is not in place of the Many Faces of, as I will review “Pac-Man” this month – see below. I’ve wanted to fill in a few of the Many Faces – the “Lost Faces” but never seem to make the time. These Lost Faces were versions that I did not have or overlooked

somehow. In fact, when I reviewed Q*bert WAY back in RT #33, it was my very first review (very meager compared to my reviews today) so, I decided that my original scores were no longer valid. Each version had to be re-played, each category re-scored and then check one versus the other, and versus all other games/categories/scores. Hopefully this makes amends, especially for the Intellivision, O2 and Atari 8 bit ports. Since you all know Q*bert . . .

Lost Face of the Q*bert - courtesy of TI-99 gamer/historian Bryan Roppolo.

Arcade: 1982 Warren Davis (Gottlieb/Mylstar). All home versions by Parker Brothers in 1983

Atari 2600 Dave Hampton. Atari 8 bit & Atari 5200 Daniel Small

Unknown: Colecovision, C-64, Vic 20, Intellivision, Odyssey 2 & TI-99.

MSX (Konami 1986)

Classic Sequels: “Faster Harder More Challenging Q*bert” 1983, never went to arcade production.

& “Q*bert’s Qubes” in 1983 at the arcade, and at home on the 2600 & CV.

Home Version Similarities: Except those in <>: all home versions have: a full, arcade sized playfield <Vic20>; Red balls (deadly), Green ball (least common item which momentarily freezes the action), Slick & Sam (Green but turn blocks back to their original color), purple ball (becomes Coily at the bottom), Wrong Way & Ugg <2600> (who jump along the sides of the blocks), the floating, swirling, multi-colored flying disks <2600 & O2 have a platform with 1 color> which take you to the top of the pyramid & if Coily jumps overboard, this gives you bonus points & clears the playfield; display on-screen info such as the target color, your score <2600 partially blocked>, lives remaining, level & round <2600>; Q*bert visually curses ("@!#?@!") when he is hit (O2); individual sound effects include bouncing/moving sounds by everything, Q*bert, Coily, Slick & Sam <2600, O2, Vic>, Wrong Way & Ugg (talk jibberish) <O2>, swirling disk, Q*bert cursing or getting squished, Q*bert over the edge, Coily over the edge, hear your extra lives earned <O2>, special music during the green ball freeze, end of round music, end of /beginning of level music different than the end of round <Vic, O2, 2600>; intermission/tutorial between levels <Vic, 2600, TI, Inty, Atari 8 bit, 5200>; and bonus points & sound for unused flying discs <most have it, but I didn’t track everything>, and probably a few more . . . whew!

Disqualified: MSX

Disqualified only because I do not have this version or system to review.

Have Nots: Odyssey 2 (29)

My first reaction was there are a lot of “Have Nots”, but this one has the most “Nots”. One redeeming quality - like most O2 games where you actually have *more* than one life, it is one of the best games on the O2. Gameplay is all there & respectable (6), but limited colors and graphics hurt – like the Green ball & Sam/Slick are identical. Addictiveness is better than most O2 games and very good (7). Graphics are passable (4) as you can tell what almost everything is but not much more. Sound is weak (4) with almost no music,

poor sounds, duplicate sounds etc. Controls are nice (8) better that what I gave them credit for in RT#33. Tedious to re-center stick each move. Overall, clearly not in the league, but will be among your most played O2 titles. A bit rare and will cost you more than it's play value - but COOL cart with a handle.

Have Nots: 2600 (34)
My first reaction was you'll enjoy playing this no matter how weak, but you must set the difficulty to "A". Gameplay is decent (6) most noticeably missing Ugg & Wrong Way and a limited # of sprites. The "B" setting would be good for children as there are no Red balls & you can toggle A/B any time. Addictiveness is worth while (7) & Controls are perfect (10). Graphics are mediocre (5) with more clarity than the Vic 20, but less color and detail & a partially blocked score. Sound is fine (6), but again, missing some effects and weak music.

Have Nots: Vic 20 (34)
My first reaction was its blockiness - too large, forcing the pyramid one level shorter. Gameplay is very good (7) increased due to 9 difficulty options, but reduced due to the pyramid size. Addictiveness is fun to play (7) & Graphics are fair (5), lacking color, detail & animation. Sound is decent (6), but missing some effects and not great music. Controls are for the most part great (9), but a little sluggish.

Have Nots: 5200 (37)
My first reaction was the joysticks really kill this one. The code is ported from the 8 bit computer version, but they somehow made the controls worse than ever. Even with a Masterplay Interface I hate this version and have had no luck. You must fire the button and move simultaneously. Changing directions is the problem. I'm guessing you must re-center the joystick or something before changing directions, but I had no luck, so Controls are mediocre (5) at best. Hard to tell, but the Gameplay looks to be all there (8) with a choice to select a varying number of start lives & also 1 or 2 players. Addictiveness is pleasant (8), with the rare PB bonus - a pause. Use standard 5200 "pause" button. Graphics are sharp (8), but the color and detail could be better. Sound effects are all in place (8) & impressive. The 5200 cart, OK pretty much all PB 5200 carts, look really cool, even if you don't play this one – get it.

Have Nots: Intellivision (37)
My first reaction was to apologize for my poor initial review in RT #33. The controls are odd, and back then, I did not learn them well enough to properly evaluate the entire game. Gameplay is really all there (8) & the Addictiveness is very fun (8) with the standard Inty diagonal pause. Graphics are pretty good (7), but just a little less color & detail than the medal winners. Sound is effective (7), a little different than most, but still all there. Controls are effective (7), once I learned to hold the controller straight, and then move diagonally. Despite using a stickler, the 16-directional controller and moving diagonally is still a real pain here and causes all my grief. Slightly off from diagonal => no movement – boo! hiss!

Bronze Medal : Atari 8 bit & TI 99 (42)

Atari 8 bit
My first reaction was not recalling having reviewed this one before and my old scores were much too low. All the 5200 scores and comments apply here except for Controls, which are perfect (10). I must also mention the awesome pause here, the "fire" button – couldn't be any better. Available on disk & cart.

TI-99
My first reaction was that since RT #33, I've finally found some great TI-99 games. It was about my fifth TI system in the wild before I actually found "real" TI games, and thus bought the system for the first time. TI-99 fans assured me that this port was very good & that my journey would not be complete without reviewing it here. Gameplay is all there (8) and Addictiveness is fun to play (7). Graphics are super (9), as good as the C-64 with lots of detail, color, animation and 3-D look to them. Sound is all there (8) and Controls are flawless (10). But Controls took some time, before I gave them a 10. You see, instead of holding the joystick rotated 45 degrees clockwise (with the fire button on top), you rotate it 45 deg CCW. Makes it awkward to hold and I would surely have lowered the score if you

needed to use the fire button for anything. Dumb programming – almost cost them a medal here. Keyboard option might be available.

Gold Medal: Commodore 64 & Colecovision (43)

Colecovision
My first reaction was that I was previously too harsh on the controls. After trying all the controllers, I found that the Amiga stick might take some getting used to, but will yield a perfect Controls score (10). Gameplay is well-done (9) all elements are in place, plus 3 skill levels of play – not found on any other version. Addictiveness is pleasant (8) helped by the intermissions and music between levels. Graphics are beautiful (8) with lots of color and multicolor, but quite as animated or 3-D like the 64. Sound is crisp (8) and all there.

Commodore 64
My first reaction was the 3-D look to the graphics usually makes the difference and so you'll probably like this one a little better. The CV has the 3 skill choices, but it doesn't take long to become hard, so I'd rather have it look better and take a little while longer to become hard. Gameplay is all there (8) and as hinted before, Graphics are wonderful (9), the best with nice 3-D animation. Addictiveness is pleasant (8) matching the CV with the intermissions as well. Who'd figure that the O2 would be the only other version with the Intermission? Controls are perfect (10) & Sound is sharp (8) - all there. Found on both a cart & disk.

Overall a tough battle from these top 4. They all are good, and yet no one version has it all. If one version had a pause, intermission & skill choices then that would have been the decisive winner.

Look for more "Lost Faces" in the future – the next one should be the outstanding C-64 port of "Demon Attack" which I now have thanks to the X1541 cable. Alan Hewston can be contacted at: Hewston95@NOTTSPAMstratos.net and visit his Many Faces site at: http://my.stratos.net/~hewston95/RT/ManyFacesHome.htm

The Many Faces of...Pac-Man

by Alan Hewston

In a change in theme this month, issue #80 will be an arcade hit from "80". 1980, that is, in "Pac-Man", one of the all time greats. Also voted in as your number one game choice for 1980. This game was specifically made to be a non-violent game, geared towards attracting woman, and children to try video games. In Japan, a slang word "paku paku" describes the opening and closing motion of the mouth while one eats. The name "Pac-Man" came from that slang, but it was initially translated to PuckMan. This was quickly modified by Midway when they distributed the game in the US market. You all know the game, the mania, and you probably know how many keys there are and even have your own theory what happened to the Atari 2600 version. Was the 2600 port the end of the beginning? One of the earliest failures/problems that helped to bring about the VG crash. Will the 7800 version win the gold medal? Keep on reading to find out ;-) See also RT issue #9, where Tom first reviewed this game for the 3 consoles.

Arcade: 1980 Namco/Midway, by Toru Iwatani with help from four others.

Home versions all programmed by Atarisoft

Apple]['83 Brian Fitzgerald

Atari 2600 '82 Todd Frye

Unknown from '83 (Atari 5200, Colecovision, Commodore 64)

Atari 8 bit '83 Joe Helleson

Commodore Vic-20 ’83 TBD + Jimmy Huey

Intellivision ’83 Mike Winans (Graphics/Eric Wels, Sound/Russ Haft)

TI-99 ’83 Howard E. Scheer

Sinclair Spectrum 1984 Atarisoft.

MSX Namcot 1984

Rumor Mill: Atari 7800 in works

Classic Sequels: Several, with countless clones and many spin offs as well.

Home Version Similarities: Except those in <>: all home versions have: 1 maze pattern which includes a tunnel, ghost hide-out in the middle, 4 ghosts, who can pack and hide each other, power pills in the corners, and a similar number of dots (compared to the 240 at the arcade) <Vic 20 (132), 2600 (126), Inty (105)>; entire maze is shown on-screen at the same time; on-screen display of the scores, cumulative prizes <Inty>, and lives remaining; pretty close to the arcade sequence of the prizes per each screen <2600>; sound effects that include background sounds <Apple][, 2600>, eating, death, new life, eating ghost, ghosts eyes returning <Vic 20>, eating prize, bonus life <C-64, Atari 8 bit, Vic 20>, power pill & music; start level options at screens 1,2,3,5,7,9,11,13 <Inty, 2600, AP2 & CV (none), Vic 20 (only 7)>; Pac-Man 20% slower when eating <TI99>; “Blinky”, fastest ghost, has max speed equal to yours; other ghosts max ~15% slower; bonus life at 10K; ghosts equal to 200, 400, 800, 1600, shown on-screen; max difficulty at ninth key; ghosts occasionally reverse directions; approximately at final 20 and then 10 dots ghosts go into chase and then faster chase mode <2600, Vic 20>; a pause <2600>; intermissions <2600, C-64, TI-99, Vic 20>.

Original Arcade sequence

Level / Prize

1/Cherry
2/Strawberry
3/Peach
5/Apple
7/Pineapple
9/Galaxian
11/Bell
13/Key
21/Ninth Key - I’ve got all the patterns down, up until the ninth key . . .

Home versions substitute the Atari logo as well as other slight variations.

Disqualified: Sinclair Spectrum & MSX

DQ is only because I do not have these versions.

Have Nots: Atari 2600 (31)
My first reaction was just like everyone else – disappointed. Screen was even 90 degrees rotated. This may have been the first game where pre-orders were taken (a standard practice for blockbuster wannabees today), which was all the more reason to absolutely despise it, when it clearly did not live up to anyone’s expectations. Sure, you didn’t need to pre-order it, perhaps played a friend’s copy and when the price came down, you still bought it - I did. It was not what we wanted, but it captured the essence and was still the best version of Pac-Man you could buy on your 2600. No doubt this disappointment and lack of quality inspired many players to become home programmers to prove that they could do better. I heard this often in the 1980’s, which helps to explain why there are countless home computer clones out there. I’d even suggest this port encouraged even more 3rd party 2600 companies to spring up or chuck out inferior products. ‘If Atari can sell

millions on this crap – why not us? Yes . . . we all realize that Atari rushed this out the door to take advantage of the market ASAP, and then eventually follow up with better versions for the home computers. Atari cut corners on this cart – fully aware that with just a couple more weeks and a little bit more memory, and time spent programming would yield a non-flickering, well programmed, fun game. But management was adamant about keeping this as a simple 2 K cart – perhaps a 2K wart would save them even more money – since they were about to finally start paying incentive royalties to the programmers for sales. That is, after the 2nd wave of Atari programmers left to form "Imagic", Atari was forced to offer better incentives, like a 10? cent per cart sold bonus to designers or programmers. They knew what they were forced to do – stop losing more programmers – but yet not risk too much of that immediate profit. Maybe this helped to do them in – in the long run. Regardless of the complexity of the issues, Atari did release the first official licensed home version of Pac-Man in the US.

Gameplay is passable at best (4) with a recognizable maze & most elements represented. With only one prize there was no reason to provide start options rounds/levels. Instead, adding a child's version and two player games with 2 different skill "A/B difficulty" settings. "A" provides less time eat the Vitamin Wafer, and shortens the duration of the power pill's effect. This handicap / difficulty option was clearly something worth while to include in all other versions and other games as well but was not. Addictiveness is exciting (7) and although instantly repetitious, still kept early players playing it for quite a while. Graphics were blah (5), with weak colors, mono colored & flickering ghosts, and a non-arcade maze with only 126 dots. Sound may have been worse, but was acceptable (5). To paraphrase my friend Tim Roach – 'If everyone hated this version, why is it that in movies and TV shows, the definitive background sound effect of a video game is usually from 2600 Pac-Man. The death sequence (4 blurbs in a row) and the next man/coming to life sequence (also 4 sounds) are heard all the time – regardless of what game or system is shown. Weird homage? Controls are perfect (10).

At Atari "Why Todd Frye." Or why not. Not having a college degree in programming, the lesser paid Todd Frye put in his time and did not leave Atari, and then cashed in the most royalties to date on 2600 "Pac-Man". Why not? It wasn't his fault it disappointed us.

Have Nots: Vic 20 (34)

My first reaction was that this game was started, then shelved, then released really late – why? Was finished by expert Vic 20 programmer Jimmy Huey. Gameplay is average (5) with such a small playfield (132 dots), awkward maze and sprites right on top of each other all game, the playability is just not there. Addictiveness is fun to play (7) but still hampered by the size. The pause is the <space bar>. One ghost is white, making it quite painful to die eating him thinking he is still eatable. Graphics are good enough (6) with everything there but the size – making it but ugly or childish. The Sound is effective (7) but could be better if not for some missed effects. The Controls are superb (9), but sluggish, and then tarnished by the tight turning maze layout which is impossible to make the quick turns as necessary.

Have Nots: Apple][(38)

My first reaction was this is the only version with a true to scale (ratio) arcade maze. But since the TV/monitor is essentially landscape and the arcade screen is portrait, every other version went with a squished landscape appearance. Going with the arcade portrait ratio makes the screen so very, very small, and space becomes wasted. But then, Gameplay is impressive (8), and despite no options, this version looks the most like the arcade. It has a demo perfect layout and the information screen. Addictiveness is impressive (8), with a pause <Esc>, intermission and demo. But there is the same white ghost problem as the Vic 20, keeping this from being the most addictive version. Graphics are all there (8) with 244 dots, good detail but limited color (white ghost). Sound is decent (6), most noticeable is the missing background noise and then factor in the odd sounding internal speaker effects. Controls are sharp (8) if you enjoy playing via keyboard. I don't and the analog stick is too accident prone for me – would only score a (7). Available only on disk.

Have Nots: TI-99 (39)

My first reaction was it is too ssslooowww. Gameplay is (7) effective, and most elements

are there, but Pac-Man should be slower when eating, compared with not eating. The fruits remain on-screen too long. Addictiveness is exciting (7) with pause <space bar>, then move your stick to continue playing. The collision detection seems a bit too harsh on this version, and did I mention it was too slowwww? Graphics are well-done (9) among the best, with detail, color and animation. 202 dots is satisfactory. Sound is OK (6), but drops a point since nearly all sound effects can only occur if there is no chomping of dots. Controls are flawless (10).

Have Nots: Intellivision (39)
My first reaction was impressed at the controls. What did they do, because using a stickler, I can do pretty well here. Controls are outstanding (9) among the best Intv games I've played. Why couldn't Q*bert do this? Gameplay is pretty decent (6), hindered by the small playfield (105 dots) and no start level options to see/practice higher screens. Addictiveness is very fun (8) with the intermissions and the standard Inty pause (diagonals). Graphics are all there (8), but could be better if a little smaller & more detailed. Sound is pleasant (8). All effects & music are good.

Have Nots: Commodore 64 (43)
My first reaction was bummed out that there are no intermissions and 3 ghosts look. Red, Pink and Orange ghosts look alike. The Gameplay is all there (8) with the 8 start level options, but the difference in the Gold medal is omitted intermissions. Addictiveness is enjoyable (8) with the "fire" button as the pause. There is a bit of a demo, but then that is not enough to cover up the missed intermissions. Graphics are outstanding (9) only the 3 similar colored ghost problem. Full, 256 dot playfield. Sound is all there (8) with good music and effects. Controls are perfect (10). Available on cart & disk.

Gold Medal: Atari 8 bit, 5200 & Colecovision (44)
A close 3 (4) way tie. I may have been too harsh on the C64 scoring.

Atari 8 bit
My first reaction was the really cool centerfold to the manual. Gameplay is all there (8) including all start level options & 256 dot playfield. Addictiveness is fantastic (9) with a pause <space>, and the intermissions. Graphics are among the best, superb (9), with color, animation, and all details. Sound is pleasant (8), all there and as good as any version. Only thing missing is the not needed, but obviously missing 10 K bonus life chime. Controls are perfect (10). Available on cart & disk.

Atari 5200
My first reaction was this is the same game as the 8 bit computer. It probably was ported exactly to or from the 8 bit. All the scores and notes are the same, except that this version does have the 10K bonus life chime. Surprisingly, the controls are excellent, but I bet you'll need a Masterplay Interface (or equivalent) to really get these perfect results.

Colecovision
My first reaction was that we got ripped off, as this cart was never officially released. The recent release of this cart through the CGE is fantastic. I think the ROM is out there and thus we can all play it or buy the cart and enjoy it today. Clearly among best. Gameplay is impressive (8) - almost the same as the others, but instead of 8 starting levels, we get 3 skill variations. I tend to favor the start levels/rounds myself, but there is no need to penalize it. Has 214 dot playfield. Addictiveness is wonderful (9) with the pause <#> and intermissions. Graphics are great (9), all there, and probably the best, with added special effects from a cool title screen that sparkles in, to the awesome re-materialization of every ghost inside the ghost chamber. Sound is all there (8) matching the best of the rest. Controls are perfect (10) using the CV controller. Cart is a bit rare, but this is the most collectible/desired version to have.

FINAL THANKS:
I owe much to Tom Zjaba, his Tomorrow's Heroes store, online site, and finally to this online magazine / newsletter. I've really appreciated the opportunity to write for the Retrogaming Times on a monthly basis, and particularly to have been able to assume control of a prominent feature, the Many Faces of reviews. Writing for the RT has become

the priority of nearly all of my gaming and spare time activities. It has affected what I play, what I look for, and buy, what I do historical research on, and how I write my reviews. I feel that I am helping to give a lot back to the retrogaming community – more than I could in any other way. The Many Faces of has also focusing my own interest in classic gaming better, by being a jack of all trades – playing every version is unique. Writing for the RT has led me to meet and interact with many fellow gamers, and I thank you for your continued support. I've even been able to expand my collection and get rid of my duplicates due to my articles. 'What will I do without the Retrogaming Times?' asks my wife. The "RT" has surely been the highlight and most cherished of my gaming experiences and I will never forget these past 6 years. With any luck we will find a way to continue the magazine, and if not, I'll still keep on writing these Many Faces of reviews. Until next time . . .

Yes, plan to come back next time. Always the optimist that we'll push on towards issue #100. I hope to review one of the biggest selling games from 1981, in RT issue #81, and just a bit late for Mother's Day, the Many Faces of "Ms. Pac-Man" on the Apple //, Atari 2600, 8 bit, 5200, 7800, C64 (2 versions?), TI-99 and Vic 20. Contact Alan Hewston at: Hewston95@NOSPAMstratos.net or visit the Many Faces of site: http://my.stratos.net/~hewston95/RT/ManyFacesHome.htm

Support Your Local Video Game Show

With game shows popping up all the time, I thought I would do one last list of the shows that I know about. Check out their sites and attend which shows you can. I may even stop off at one in the future.

Midwest Gaming Classic (coming up in May)
http://www.midwestgamingclassic.com/

Classic Gaming Expo (the show to attend)
http://www.cgexpo.com/

Phillyclassic (The East Coast's answer to CGE)
http://phillyclassic.com/

East Coast Gaming Expo (Free tables, admission and more!)
http://www.ecgx.com/

CCAG (Northern Ohio's show that may be back on this year)
http://www.ccagshow.com/CurrentShow/docGeneralInformation.htm

MagFest (It's a classic game show and a concert!)
http://www.magfest.org/

Jagfest (It is for the Jag and all things Atari)
http://jaguar.holyoak.com/jagfest/

Austin Gaming Expo (Because a state as great as Texas deserves a great show)
http://www.austingamingexpo.com/

Oklahoma Gaming Exhibition
http://ivorytower.emuviews.com/okge/home.htm

Video Game Summit
http://avc.atari-users.net/Events/FestVGS.html

One Final Story

Out of all the stuff I was asked to write for the newsletter, I had someone ask for me to tell one more story from the classic age of video games. So here is one last story of when I was young and so was the video game industry.

My best friend when I was young was Ed. He also was one of the first people that I knew who figured out the patterns on Pac-man. We were going to send in the patterns to magazines and dreamed of being famous, but someone beat us to it. But that is not the subject of this story. This story is about Pac-man and about not seeing the obvious.

While we played Pac-man, we noticed all the different bonuses that appeared each level. Cherries, strawberries and others. It was our mission to see what all the prizes were. When we came to one, we were stumped to what it was. Every prize had been a type of food and we figured it was also a type of food. My friend Ed said it was a crepe. I had never heard of a crepe so I could not argue it, but I thought it was an Ice Cream Sundae. It looked like one to me, a very strange looking one, but I did not think it was a crepe. As we were arguing over it one time while playing, a kid came up and laughed at us. He said it was a ship from Galaxian. Then like someone opened our eyes, we could see it really was a Galaxian ship and not some crazy food concoction that we came up with. We both felt embarrassed and had a good laugh.

The Long and Winding Road

It has been close to seven years since I started doing this newsletter. I have seen a small hobby grow into a big hobby. When I started there was no Classic Gaming Expo, there was no Phillyclassic. The only classic show that I knew of and attended was the Electronicon. That show was a direct reason for this newsletter. I went to that show as a dealer and a collector. I was only viewed as a dealer. I met people there who created their own Atari games and others who worked on rarity lists or other stuff. I met Fred Wagaman who became a good friend of mine. But I came away from the show with a sense of awe for the close knit community and its passion for classic games. I also came away with a feeling of alienation as I was more viewed as someone who did not care about games but only sold them for a profit. It was at this show that I decided that I wanted to give something back to the community. I wanted to be more than just a dealer. At that time I had a large collection of video games in my own collection (at one time I was 4 games away from having a full Intellivision collection and 5 games away from having a complete Colecovision collection). So I came home and thought about what I could do to be part of the community. After much thought and searching on the internet, I decided to go with what I was good at. I would create an online newsletter and post it on my site. I would talk about the joy of collecting and playing classic games. I would open it up for anyone who wanted to write for it and express their opinion on classic games.

It took about 10 issues for it to really take off. It was about that time when Fred Wagaman and Doug Saxon came aboard as writers. Suddenly the one man newsletter became a collaborative effort. Soon others joined. Alan Hewston has become a cornerstone of the newsletter. with the longest running feature as well as the most popular. Adam King has added consistency and created his own place in the newsletter with his articles. Dave Mrozek, the video game critic gave us a ton of great reviews and went on to do his own site. Jim Krych showed us the joys of the TI computer and later went on to create the Devastator arcade controller (I learned to call it an arcade controller and not joystick as people look at you weird when you ask them if they want to come back to your house to see your really big joystick). Geoff Voigt gave us a very unique slant on video games as well as was our reporter for the Classic Gaming Expo. Others have joined for a short time. Matt Allen, William Cassidy, Rayth Orlea, Paul Smith, Ryan Harrison, Ben Valdes, Reinhard Traunmueller, Sarah Szefer, Daran Michael Blackwell, Robsterman, Tom Crugnale and anyone who I missed. I have been blessed to have so many great writers on this newsletter over the year and it is one of the reasons for the longevity of the newsletter.

I was also gifted to get many sites post about the release of a new issue. This helped let people know about the newsletter and really boosted readership. Sites like Atari Age, Dave's Video Game Classics (now known as the Vintage Gaming Network), Classic Gaming and Digital Press, we received alot of coverage. There were also other sites that either went out of business, quit posting or changed formats that quit posting, but they did

help us get going in the early days. I thank every site that helped us and know that I would not have nowhere near as many readers as I did without your coverage.

But now the time has come to put the newsletter out to pasture. I have written more articles than I ever anticipated. It went longer than I ever imagined. But times have changed and I have changed. While I still play classic games, most of my game playing comes from commercial releases like Intellivision Lives or Activision Anthology than the actual machines. I sold off my actual game collection years ago when I needed money for a lawyer to get my son into a special school (who by the way is doing well at a private school for children with autism). I think I lost some of the drive then when I slowly sold off all my systems and later my handhelds and much of my memorabilia (especially my very large magazine collection). But I kept on writing about classic games.

Now it is time to let others write about classic games. With so many great websites offering newsletters and quite a few paper versions, there is plenty for gamers to read. And there are more sites coming every day. Even Alan, Adam and others have talked about doing their own version of a newsletter in the spirit of Retrogaming Times. I may do an article here or there for some other newsletter, but not immediately. I plan on taking some time off and just playing games.

Hope you enjoyed this last issue. I started working on it right after I finished the last issue so that it would be the biggest and best issue ever. I figured if I was going to go out, I would go out with a bang. Read it, enjoy it and thanks for coming by every month. In closing, don't be upset that the newsletter is ending, but be glad it lasted as long as it did. There are 80 issues worth of reading for you to enjoy and it doesn't cost you a dime to enjoy it all! And that is something worth celebrating!

Goodbye and Good Gaming!

-Tom Zjaba

(This issue was done while listening to ending themed songs like "Is That All There Is?" by Peggy Lee, "The Long and Winding Road" by the Beatles, "Those Were the Days" by Mary Hopkins and "That Was Yesterday" by Chad and Jeremy.)

Eyeball Benders Answers

Eyeball #1

Eyeball #2

Eyeball #3

Eyeball #4

Eyeball #5

Eyeball #6