

TOMORROW'S HEROES

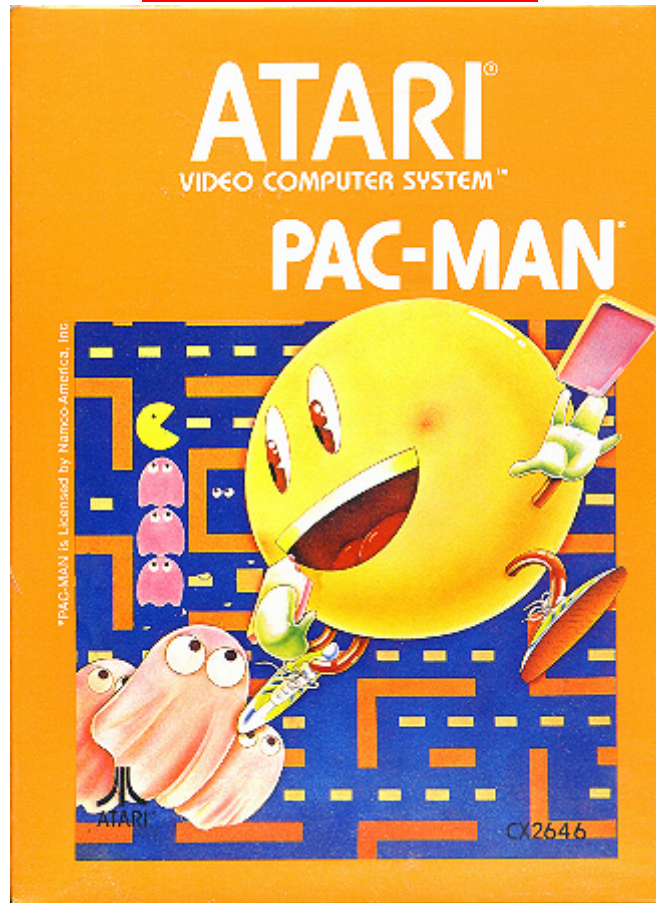
Retro Times 6

The Newsletter for the Retro Gamer in All of Us

February 1998

Introduction

RETRO TIMES #6



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Welcome once again to the fastest growing classic gaming newsletter on the internet (at least in size as it keeps getting bigger and bigger). Since I had so much fun with the themed newsletter, I decided to do it again. This time it is dedicated to Pacman and his many clones and sequels. The importance this game has had on the video game industry

cannot be overlooked. No game has been more imitated (Doom may be catching up) and very few game characters are more known. So sit back and enjoy another newsletter and be safe in knowing that you are getting your money's worth.

HEY! THAT GAME TALKED!

While at another comic book show, my cousin Dave and myself checked out the local arcade. Once again it was a mall show and we soon found the arcade. As we entered, I looked around at the familiar games that every arcade had, Donkey Kong, Pacman, etc... But in the one corner was a game I had never seen before. So, I purchased a buck worth of tokens and headed over to play it. I had a compulsion to always try every new game I came across (a habit that has switched to potato chips, should have stuck with games). No matter how stupid it looked, I had to play it. Some of the dumbest looking games were my favorites and with classic games, looks can be deceiving. So I walked over to this game called "Space Fury" and stuck my token in. I pressed the start button (I know I should have watched the intro screen to learn how to play the game, but being male and our need to not use instructions except in the case of an emergency, I went ahead and played). I was suddenly greeted by a big, one-eyed alien with an attitude. "So a creature for my amusement, prepare for battle" he bellowed at me. I was challenged and had to boot his alien butt back to the furthest reaches of space.

The first game came to an end and while I thought I did pretty good for a first time player, my alien opponent didn't feel the same. "You were an adequate opponent" he boasted to me. Well, that was enough to force a second and third battle. I was going to teach that wiseapple who was the boss. After a few tokens, I became a stimulating opponent. It wasn't so much the game, as the gameplay was decent at best. It was the boasting of the alien commander. He attacked me on a personal level and I wanted to prove him wrong. In the end, I didn't defeat him, but I learned a lesson in humility. I vowed that one day I would have my revenge on that cyclopean instigator. Now with MAME, I can show him once and for all who is the greatest space fighter in the cosmos!

PACMAN, THE BABE RUTH OF VIDEO GAMES!

Interesting title? What do I mean by that. I feel that Pacman is to video games, what Babe Ruth is to baseball. He was the game that really put the gaming over the hump and really sent the popularity soaring. Sure baseball was a big sport before Babe joined and it had it's share of stars like Ty Cobb, Tris Speaker, Cy Young and many others. But Babe Ruth was bigger and more known than any of them. He elevated the superstar player to another plateau and really packed the stands. Pacman did the same to the arcade business. There were big hits before him, Space Invaders to name one of them, but he really brought in the people and most importantly he brought in both sexes. Games were more a guy's market with all of the shooting games and such. But Pacman was cute, it was easy and most importantly it was fun! Anyone could learn to play Pacman, it was that easy. But not anyone could master it. That took enough skill to keep the hardcore gamers coming back.

Also like Babe Ruth, Pacman was a merchandise bonanza. He had a cartoon show, stuffed animals, records, books and a whole lot more. No other video game character was

so merchandised and I don't know if anyone has beaten him, except maybe Mario. Babe Ruth was also heavily merchandised with his name and likeness on all kinds of products. From cereal to ball gloves to food products, the Babe was everywhere. No other ballplayer before and very few since have had that much advertising exposure. They both were cash cows and alot of people were making good money off them.

The third way they are alike is they both have stood the test of time. While Pacman hasn't been around as long, his popularity is still known and he is a household name. Even younger kids who grew up on Playstations and Saturns know who Pacman is. They may not have played the game, but they are familiar with the mechanics of the game and the characters. Same is true with Babe Ruth. With the majority of Americans not old enough to have seen Babe Ruth play, they still know about him. His name and his accomplishments are legendary and a part of the lore of the game.

So there is my reasoning to why Pacman is the Babe Ruth of video games. You may agree with me or think I am way off base (pun intended). As always, I would love to read any feedback on this. Now the question is if Pacman is the Babe Ruth, who is the Lou Gehrig?

PUTTING A HIGH PRICE ON INFERIORITY

Classic video games is probably the only collectible market that puts a high price tag on inferior products. Many of the most expensive games are among the worse games in terms of gameplay. Sure they are rare, but there is a good reason for that. They were so bad that most people were unwilling to pay the \$30-\$40 for them. Once word got out how bad some of these games were, sales slowed up and many were sent back. But because they are hard to find and there are people out there who want to have all the Atari games, they are worth alot of money. No other industry is mediocrity so cherished. Do you think the Honus Wagner tobacco card would be in such demand if it was an unknown ballplayer instead of a hall of famer? A great example is the Mickey Mantle Rookie. This card is double printed, meaning there are twice as many of these as other cards in the set. But it is worth alot more than any card in the set. Why? Because Mickey Mantle was a great ballplayer. Even the Mickey Mantle 1951 Bowman rookie, that was out a year before the Topps Rookie and is harder to find isn't worth as much.

But in the classic game market, the sheer rarity of the cart overshadows all else. There are a few exceptions like Crazy Climber which is rare and a good game, but they are exceptions to the rule as opposed to being the rule. I personally think that game should be worth alot more than some of the games that are rarer but aren't worth playing. Check out one of the emulators and try some of these rarities, they stink.

So once again the classic video game market bucks the trend. It is truly a market that dances to the beat of its own drum. Who knows, maybe this trend will change and maybe the Titanic will be unsinkable.

DIGITAL PRESS CD

For anyone who hasn't ordered this two CD collection, my only question is WHY? This is one of the best values in the free world. You get two CDs chock full of goodies for the classic gamer for a measly price of \$12.00. That is \$12.00 shipped. I challenge you to find a better value out there. You can't!

The first CD is full of info and pictures of all the classic carts. You get tons of screen shots, pictures of the carts, the boxes and the overlays. Plus, you get most of the rule books. No more guessing how to play a game, it is right there. What systems does it cover? All of the classic systems from Atari 2600 to the Vectrex. You even get some of the more obscure systems like the Fairchild Channel F and the Emerson Arcadia. Plus, there are emulators for most of the systems.

If this isn't enough, you also get coverage of handhelds and tabletops and some other stuff. I now found out all the tabletops I am missing. Gee, thanks alot. Like I am ever going to find a Popeye or Star Castle tabletop.

The second CD is a hoot! While it has limited entertainment, it is great! You get 28 original Atari and other classic game commercials and more. Such great catch phrases as "Have you played Atari today?" run rampant in this CD. What a timewarp it is as I remember more of these commercials than I care to admit to. The only problem is that these commercials are now stuck in my head and I occasionally find myself singing "Mega...Megamania", which can be real embarrassing if someone overhears me. You know how hard it is to explain that to someone. We are talking white coats.

If you want one of these CD collections, and what true classic gamer doesn't, then you better head over to the Digital Press web site and order one of these. The address is www.digitpress.com. Trust me, this is a deal and then some!

NEW ATARI GAME

I spoke about it briefly last issue, but now it is time for the whole scoop. As I said before, Oystron is a new game that was created for the Atari 2600. It was made by Piero Cavina and it is quite an enjoyable game. Once again, you can find it at <http://www.primenet.com/~nickb/oystron.htm> It plays a bit like one of my favorite Vectrex games, Ripoff. But it also is a bit like one of my favorite 2600 games, Turmoil. So you add two of my favorite games together and do you get an instant classic? Well, not totally, but you do get one heck of a fun game.

Oystron deals with a ship that is being attacked by waves of aliens who are out to steal his crystals. But you can get more crystals by blasting some of the ships which release them and then you can place them where you want. This is the part that is somewhat like Ripoff. The part that is like Turmoil is that some of the ships change after they get a crystal and bring it all the way back. They change into something tougher. This can make things real tough and lots of fun.

While the game is only available as a rom to run on an emulator or through Starpath Supercharger (I have no idea how to do this, so don't email me. Email the author and he

can explain to you). A cartridge format is in the works, but nothing definite yet.

I have a few suggestions for the game (Give the guy a newsletter and he thinks he is a pro or something). I would like to see a two player version. Possibly in the Ripoff mode where you can run into each other and destroy your ships. Also an unlimited supply of ships mode where the game would end when the crystals are all taken would be pretty cool. Always easier to come up with stuff when you know you don't have to do the programming. Overall it is a very good game and I recommend for everyone who has an Atari emulator to go over and try it.

MAME REVIEWS

As I explored the many roms for MAME, I found a few more long lost favorites. These are games that I had played when they came out but had completely forgotten about. It was like finding a box of toys from your youth or some old love letters, a trip down memory lane to a simpler and more enjoyable time.

Make Trax

This was one of those Pacman clones that added a few twists to the game. You are a paint roller and your job is to paint the screen. But as in all video games, nothing is ever that simple. You have two weird looking creatures that chase you around and will kill you with a simple touch. But instead of energizers, you have this odd contraption (sorta a mini steam roller) that you push over them. It flattens them and sends them back to their home, where they repair themselves and come back to harass you again. Each time you run one of the two creatures over, you get points. It starts at 200 points, then doubles and keeps doubling until 3200 points. While it may in theory go higher than this, I doubt you could get the creatures to agree. After you hit 3200 points, they run from that steam roller like a cavity filled kid runs from a dentist.

If that wasn't enough to keep you busy, a little animal comes out to put footprints all over your freshly painted floor. First level is a kitty cat. Second level is a mouse or rat, depending on how mad they make you. I haven't gotten past this level yet to see if there is another animal.

But you aren't in a basic maze. No siree, you have tunnels on the side and top to escape into and a ramp that goes over the board. While these come in handy to escape your pursuers, they also leave blind spots that must be painted. I have had a few games where I ran around trying to find out what needed to be painted to finish a level only to have it be an area I couldn't see. Talk about irritating!

Overall, a fun little game that added enough twists on the Pacman theme to stand apart. There is also a clone of it called Crush Roller. I am pretty sure that Make Trax came out first. Try it and you may get hooked!

Monster Bash

When MAME 0.30 came out, I immediately looked over the list of ROMs. Alright, working

Zookeeper. Wow! Frenzy and Foodfight! Bump n Jump, whoohoo! In case you couldn't notice, I was estactic. Almost all of the games I really wanted added, were added. As I was downloading the roms (to be erased in 24 hours after previewing them, wink. wink. nudge. nudge.), I saw one of a game I didn't remember. Monster Bash? Hmmm, that sounds interesting. So I downloaded the game and the accompanying sound file, and decided to try the game. As the game began and the first level loaded up, I realized "Hey! I remember this game! This is so cool!". Needless to say, I enjoyed myself immensely.

The idea of the game is that you have to go to different haunted houses and stop the main bad guy. The first level is Dracula, the Frankenstein, followed by the Creature. There are also bats, wolves and other beasties to stop you. You can shoot them, but in order to defeat the main creature, you need to grab a glowing sword. After doing this, you can zap the bad guy and win the level. Sound easy? Obviously you never played the game. First you have to light a few candles to get the sword to glow. Once this happens, you can go up and grab the sword. Once you do, Dracula or whoever makes a mad dash from you. They may be dead, but they aren't brain dead. So you must catch up to them and shoot a charge at them, and you better hit them as you only get one try. Not exactly a walk in the park. All the while there are these annoying bats and such, getting in your way.

The graphics are gorgeous with the bad guys having larger heads. The sound is typical haunted house fare and really sets the mood. Another of those fun little gems that make you thank God or whatever you call your deity, daily for MAME. A thousand thanks to everyone who has and still works on this.

(By the way, I wanted to take this time to give proper credit. Last month I told you about the mouse/keyboard combo for playing Discs of Tron. I forgot to give credit to Doug MacGowen, a friend and customer who showed that to me. I was fumbling with a bunch of keys before he showed me this much better method.)

A DIFFERENT MAME LIST

One of the things I see all over are want lists or wish lists of games people would really like to see added to MAME. Well, I'm not a selfish person. If there never was anymore additions to MAME, I would die a happy person. It has already exceeded every expectation I had for it. Sure there are minor flaws like no sound for Berzerk and Frenzy, but considering the price paid, who am I to complain. So I decided to instead of putting another want list, I would do a list of the reasons MAME is so great. Feel free to send it to everyone involved and let them know that there are many people out there who cannot thank them enough.

TOM'S TOP TEN FAVORITE THINGS ABOUT MAME

10. Being able to put your own screen shots on the menu.
9. Being able to save your high scores!
8. The ability to play the real versions of games that otherwise would be unavailable to me like Jungle King and Tapper.
7. The ability to play arcade games that I never encountered before and probably never would have because they aren't popular enough for compilations.

6. Finally being able to play all four Mr. Do's!
5. The tons of hours invested in the 30 versions in order to give us correct colors, sound and more games.
4. The small amount of space it takes on the hard drive.
3. The ability to customize the keyboard buttons and other features.
2. The price!
1. The 340+ games you can now experience without having to win a lottery to afford them.

A DEEPER LOOK

To keep with my theme, this month's deeper look will deal with a couple of Pacman clones. It was tough to choose two with the ton of clones made from this game. These are two that added some unique features to make them stand out. So wakka wakka down memory lane with me.



A Deeper Look At Mousetrap

This was probably one of the most ambitious of the Pacman clones. They really tried to add everything short of the kitchen sink into this one. While it shares many of the same things with Pacman (a maze, creatures chasing you, energizers of sorts and bonuses), it took each to an extreme. Only the concept is the same, the rest is completely different and quite refreshing.

First off, you are a mouse and are being chased by cats. Not a major stretch, but a difference. Instead of just running over an energizer and activating it, you store them and use them at your leisure. They come in the form of bones and when activated, changes your mouse into a dog and then you eat the cats. Sorta a Tom & Jerry dream sequence. I personally like the idea of being able to store the bones as it gives you a reason to try really hard to get through the early levels without using a bone. One feature that is a straight ripoff of Pacman is that you must clear the maze before moving to the next level. Instead of dots, you had to clear away pieces of cheese.

One big difference and both an interesting addition and a frustrating one is the different color doors. You can open and close all the doors of a particular color. This adds alot of strategy to the game and also makes it tough to keep track of moving, the doors and the dog changing button. After a handful of games, it gets to be second nature, but it can be

awfully frustrating at first. There is even a teleporter in the middle of the screen that randomly puts you in one of the corners. One of those blessing/curse kind of things. Sorta like warping in Asteroids.

One of the most ambitious and repetitive additions to this game is the prizes. One appears and after eating it, another one appears and then another. There is a set amount and the number goes up by one each level. While it is neat to see what the new prize is that level, it is also quite repetitive to have to see all of them over again each level before you can see the new one that is of course the last one. By the way, does anyone know how many different prizes there were in this game? I got bored before ever finding out.

In conclusion, while this was a Pacman clone in the basic format, there is alot more to the game than Pacman. As far as I know, the only versions available were for the Colecovision, Intellivision and the Atari 2600. Of course, the Colecovision version is better. Plus, the Colecovision version is quite common and worth the \$3.00 you will have to pay for it.



[A Deeper Look At KC Munchkin](#)

This Pacman clone was so much a clone, that it brought about a lawsuit. While many people consider imitation the sincerest form of flattery, Atari didn't see it that way and sued Magnavox.

Enough about the legal aspects, let's get to the game. The game plays quite identical to Pacman, with all the basic features. The main character looks different and so do the ghosts, but not by that much (unless you compare it to the awful 2600 Pacman that should have been arrested for impersonating a video game). The one big difference between this and Pacman is the ability to create your own mazes. As far as I know, this is one of the first games that let you have some control. It was a great joy to be able and customize the mazes and challenge your friends to try and defeat them. I had hours of fun fooling around with this. The only flaw was you couldn't save your masterpieces. Once that system was turned off, it was goodbye to your work. I guess you could take a picture of it, but it wasn't the same.

All in all, KC Munchkin was Pacman with a little extra. For anyone who played the Atari

2600 version, there was only one worthwhile Pacman like game to play. That was before Ms Pacman came out.

Question of the Month

This question isn't just geared at classic games (as you will see by my answer). It can be about any video game, whether it is on the computer or a console or an arcade machine. With that out of the way, the question is.....Which Game had the most impact on you? Which game totally captivated you?

For me that game was none other than Dungeon Master for the Atari ST computer. I bought an Atari ST to just play this game (sold a majority of my comic collection to afford it and still consider it a good move). I still remember fondly how much I enjoyed playing this game. It is one of the first games I conquered. Not a small feat. I still remember things like the first time I came face to face with the dragon (who looked more like a red T-Rex) and the fun of trying different combinations to find new spells. While it may not be a classic game (borderline as it came out about 12 years ago), it is one of the games that really blew me away.

How Much Stuff Is Out There?

Every so often, I see a post about someone finding a big stash of games. A lot of times it is a bunch of boxed games from a particular company, like the bunch of Mystique games that ran through the market awhile ago. Or I stop at a site like Oshea's and see the ton of games they have (sure there are only a handful of titles, but the volume of each title is immense) and one has to wonder how much more is out there? If this market keeps growing like it appears to be, then there will probably be a lot of stuff pulled out of the closets, garages, basements and storage sheds. Will the rare games be as rare in say five years? Or will some of them become quite common like Jr Pacman and a few others that popped up.

Right now there is no reason for most people to bother with the classic games as they are viewed as junk by the majority of the population. Five years ago, I didn't think they had any real value, save the enjoyment derived from them. Games like Chase the Chuckwagon and Eli's Ladder were unheard of to me. I even was a game dealer for a summer back during the heyday of classic gaming and yet there are tons of games I never heard of. I'm sure this is true of most people. But as I got back into the retro gaming, these names became well known to me. But are they truly as rare as we think they are? How do we know someone who worked for the dog food company didn't take home all the carts that weren't claimed by consumers. How do we know there isn't a few hundred or maybe even a few thousand copies hidden somewhere just waiting to flood the market?

Don't get me wrong, I'm not trying to destroy the value of Chase the Chuckwagon, it is just an example. But think about this before you invest your children's college funds into the games. Sure, they may shoot up in value and you could get rich. But the opposite could happen. Just remember that video games are a lot like other items we spend our disposable income on. They aren't necessary for life. I have seen enough people get

themselves deep in debt by trying to buy every comic or sports card. I seen some families wrecked because someone's hobby got out of control. Even though I sell games, I still think family and friends are more important. Just a little food for thought. And by the way, I try to keep alot of my game prices low, because retrogaming should be an affordable and enjoyable hobby. So enjoy it!

Conclusion

Once again, another issue comes to an end. And once again, I made this larger than the last issue. I don't know how much longer I can keep increasing the size, but I will keep trying. I really enjoy doing this and love all the responses I get from it. I do take time to read every request and try to answer them all. Once again, enjoy those classic games and play a game for me.

-Tom Zjaba

Pictures provided by the Digital Press CD-Rom. It can be ordered from Digital Press' Web Site. Address is www.digitpress.com.