

RETROTIMES #24

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Introduction

I made it back from the Classic Game Expo with a big box of games in my hand and a handful of cash. It was great time and I highly recommend it to everyone for next year. Even with my vacation, I will strive to get this issue out on time. I received alot of submissions, so it should be pretty easy on me. Plus, I wrote some of it beforehand to make it easier on me. So sit back and enjoy the issue!

Classic Gaming Expo - One Man's Story

First off, I took a camera with me to Las Vegas and had every intention of getting pictures, but for some reason, I never did. The camera stayed packed in the suitcase and was never used. So this will be a verbal description of the show and I will give you some links to other sites that have pictures of the show. So here is a brief rundown of some of the fun events that went on at the show and the highlights.

The Guests

These people were the highlight of the show! From the dignified Ralph Baer who brought a prototype of the Original Odyssey along, to the very entertaining Activision guys (whose conference was the best) to the coin-op guys (who also put on a great conference) and everyone else who took time out of their busy schedules to meet with their fans, they were all the best! You could not ask for a more accommodating and courteous group. They all were willing to sign autographs (and didn't even balk at a few people who brought stacks of carts up to have signed) and answered any questions you had. My one regret is that I wasn't able to attend more of the conferences as the ones I did attend were very good.

This alone was worth the price of admission

[The Dealers](#)

The selection was limited with only a few selling classic games. There were some deals out there, especially one dealer who was selling shrinkwrapped games anywhere from \$5.00 (for games like Astrochase for the 5200) to as low as \$2.00 (for games like (B-17 Bomber and Star Trek for the 5200). He also had a nice selection of loose games. I was able to find a Popeye board game to nearly complete my collection for \$5.00 and found a lot of stuff I would have bought if my wife wasn't along. While the really rare games were quite expensive and quite elusive, they could be found if you had the money to spare.

If you were into newer stuff, there was Nyko with a wide selection of joysticks and more for the Playstation and other newer systems and Telegames and Songbird had games for the Atari Jaguar and Lynx, including some brand new games that were being shown. Ponx was a very cool game and almost made me get another Lynx.

The Blue Sky Rangers had an incredible booth with some unreleased games being shown, including Masters of the Universe for the Coleco and Rocky & Bullwinkle and Yogi's Frustration for the Intellivision. There were people there at all times to take the time out to tell you about the games.

Another great booth was the Atari booth! This is the new Atari, the one owned by Hasbro. There they had the upcoming Pong, Missile Command and Q*Bert games available for play! The Pong was set up for four players and was a lot of fun! It retained much of the feel of the old game with a little Warlords mixed in. The graphics and play screens were beautiful to look at and the controls were very precise. The Q*Bert showed a lot of promise, but I didn't play enough to give a proper review as it was always being played. The Missile Command played a lot like the Jaguar version and really needed a trackball to get a good feel for it. It just isn't the same with a Playstation controller.

There were also two joysticks on display, the Arcade 2000 and the Hotrod. Both also had arcade cabinets for MAME and were very impressive! Look later in the newsletter for a full review of each joystick.

There were other booths, including the Digital Press, Classic Gamer Magazine and more! It was a show with a lot to offer.

[The Arcade](#)

The best way to kill time at this show was the arcade. Around the show, there was an impressive group of arcade games, with ones for any taste. Here is an incomplete list of the games available to play for free: Reactor, Bubbles, Mad Planets, Missile Command, Battlezone, Joust, Jr Pacman, Tutankham, Food Fight, Road Blasters, Mouse Trap, Crystal Castles, Bump n Jump and more! Add in two classic pinball machines and two Hydro Thunder machines and you have an impressive selection of games! Add to that a long row of home consoles set up, including a Bally, Atari 7800, Intellivision, Vectrex and more and you have more entertainment that you can shake a stick at.

[The People](#)

One of the best parts was meeting the many people I have corresponded with on the internet. There were so many that I was able to meet and it was a wonderful experience. I received quite a few praises from readers of the newsletter and hopefully some future submissions.

[The Rumble](#)

Probably the most unique experience at the show was the rumble! It all started when someone decided to dump a bunch of video game carts and poured out boxes and boxes of carts, both loose and boxed onto the floor. He then announced that all the games were to be sold at \$0.50 each and you had the classic video game equivalent of the Royal Rumble. Like many others, I put my pride aside and dove right in. But unlike a battle for Furbies at Christmas, this was more civil. If you saw a cart you wanted, you asked someone to get it for you and most times they would. So you will probably see some funny pictures of us crawling around the floor in search of deals.

[The Museum](#)

The museum featured almost all of the old systems and sported a nice selection of stuff. From the one of a kind items like the Color Vectrex to the more common stuff like the Atari 2600 system, you had a nice selection of stuff to look at.

[Wrap-up](#)

All in all, the show was alot of fun and featured alot of entertainment for the low price. Plus, being in Las Vegas, it offered alot of entertainment outside the show. So if you brought a significant other along like I did, they had plenty to do. What more can you ask of a show?

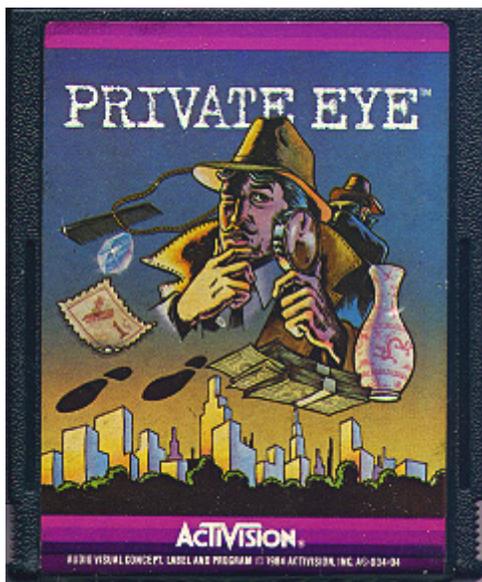
[Eyeball Benders - Part Two](#)

by [Alan Hewston](#)

Here are some more deceptively fun Eyeball Benders to test your identification skills. How many can you get this month?

[Click here to go to the Eyeball Benders.](#)

(Alan Hewston is a "Controls" engineer at the newly re-named NASA John H. Glenn Research Center in Cleveland, OH. He loves to take apart all his videogame H/W and controllers and see what makes them tick (or not tick). Alan can be reached at:hewston95@stratos.net).



The Elusive Private Eye

by [William Cassidy](#)

Recently I got thinking about the cartridges that, for one reason or another, are the most highly prized items in my collection. Many of them are rare, or very fun to play--or hopefully both--but it seems that most of them have a story behind them. I thought I'd share one of those stories here in Retrogaming Times.

The game in question is none other than Activision's Private Eye for the Atari 2600. This game is moderately rare, and isn't a half bad game either, although I wouldn't consider it one of my favorites. Why then, is it one of the most prized cartridges in my collection? Well, it's kind of an involved story, but those are the most interesting kind, right?

Rewind back to early 1995...

Right after I started collecting, I was lucky enough to purchase a huge collection of over 100 classic games from a computer vendor. There were some real gems in there, including a boxed Gameline Master Module(!), a shrinkwrapped Odyssey2 Atlantis, as well as the aforementioned Private Eye.

Fast forward to a few months later. I'm really into the hobby at this point, and by now I have an Odyssey2 console. I'm frantically looking for complete Master Strategy sets. One night, I'm surfing the Internet and I come across someone who has a complete, boxed, pieces-still-in-plastic-baggies Quest for the Rings set for trade. Well, I've gotta have this! I make an offer from my somewhat meager pool of trade bait, but the guy reasonably wants a little more. I consider, and finally I offer him the rarest game I had that was on his want list: Private Eye. Normally I don't like to trade items I've only one of, but this was a special occasion. He accepted, and I never once regretted losing Private Eye for the great QFTR set. Besides, I could always get Private Eye again later...

Fast forward again another few months. I receive a classic video game catalog in the mail, and am thrilled to find that the vendor in question has a copy of P.T. Barnum's Acrobats for the Odyssey2. Nowadays, it seems you can get a copy pretty readily, but a couple years

ago, I never could find it. I quickly send in a check, along with a list of alternate titles (the catalog said to do this in case the game you wanted became unavailable). So, I sent in the list, which included Private Eye, and I waited.

And waited...

And waited...

Eventually I called the vendor to ask what the holdup was. He told me he lost the Acrobats cart, but he was sure he still had it, and did I want to keep waiting for him to find it? I was willing to wait, but over the next few weeks, he kept promising to look for it and then forgetting. I finally told him that if he didn't find it in another week, to go ahead and send alternate title(s). More weeks went by, and I finally gave up and resigned myself to the fact I'd been ripped off.

I was a veteran collector now, and I'd been participating in newsgroup auctions for quite a while. I was currently bidding in one that included a nearly complete Great Wall Street Fortune Hunt set for the Odyssey2, unquestionably the rarest Master Strategy set and the only one I didn't have. I'd already won a couple of things in this auction, but the bidding on the GWSFH set was getting fierce. Monetary bids had been bypassed and people were bidding with better and better trade items. I had a few rarer CV items I didn't need, and I became one of two contenders for the coveted GWSFH set. But, on the final day of the auction, I got outbid by a slight margin. I had no other good trade bait, so I had nearly given up.

However, what should arrive in the mail but my long-lost order from the catalog vendor. Acrobats was nowhere to be seen, but he had given me two rare 2600 carts as a replacement: Tax Avoiders, and--you guessed it--Private Eye. I played Tax Avoiders and enjoyed it, so it was a keeper. But, now I had a decision to make: keep Private Eye, or offer it as a last-ditch attempt to get the GWSFH set? "Easy come, easy go," I thought, and I made the offer. At the last minute, I won! And for the SECOND time, I traded Private Eye away for an Odyssey2 Master Strategy set. What are the odds?

Fast forward yet again. My collecting habit had done nothing but grow, and my eye ("eye," get it?) was always open for the elusive Private Eye cart. I saw it sometimes, but it usually sold for more than I wanted to pay. Until, one day in early 1999, I finally won it in an auction for \$6. It's still a fun game, and I have all three Master Strategy sets now, so this time it's in my collection to stay! :) And I'll always have an interesting story about this particular Activision cart.

[William Cassidy](http://www.classicgaming.com/o2home/) is a classic gaming addict who is still recovering from moving over 500 games and 10 consoles across southwestern Ohio. When not moving, he maintains The Odyssey2 Homepage! at <http://www.classicgaming.com/o2home/>.

Further Adventures of Billy the Block

While going through the mail the other day, I came across an interesting letter. It was from our friend and forgotten classic game hero, Billy the Block. Seems he was touched by our articles and wanted to share more of his life's story with us. It appears that he wasn't only

a major influence in the video game market, but quite a few other entertainment medias. This is but one of the stories he has to tell, but he says he will only give out small doses of the Billy legend, in hopes to build up a demand and a hopeful return to the game market.

"One of my jobs, you see, was a test job of sorts. There was this third ranked news show in a decent sized market. I don't wanna get into exact details, but let's just say the weather was pretty easy to predict there. Anyways, they decided to try something new to get viewers to their news show, since they were in a distant third. So they decided to do the news like a musical. Yeah, instead of reading the news, they were gonna sing it and to top that off, they were going to have the words going along the bottom of the screen for the viewers to sing along with. Well, my part in this whole disaster was to be the bouncing ball of sorts. Along with a handful of other hopeful pixels were gonna bounce along with the song. To liven things up, they wanted to have different colored blocks for different segments. I personally think it was so they didn't have to rely on any one block if this idea hit and they wouldn't have to pay us much. They were cheap buggers, they were. Anyways, I went along with it and since I had the most experience of any of the guys, I got to do the start of the show. The idea was a big failure, it was. But something good did come out of it.

One day we were all pretty bored. It was one of them days when next to nothing was happening in the news. Even the music was drab and boring. So to liven things up, we pixels got together and decided to make mustaches and beards on the newscasters faces. I can tell you that the boss didn't like this one bit, no he didn't. He was ready to dump us all for good when a junior programmer or something or other came rushing in the room to show him one segment of the show. It was a part about the vice president jabbing on about something or other. Well, we weren't too fond of him, so we covered his face up and distorted it beyond recognition. It seems that this guy had the bright idea of pixelating out faces of people on the show that didn't want their identities known. So our job description changed and the guy went on to copyright the idea and get filthy rich. He soon bought the television station and fired our old boss. What did we get out of it? We got to have new jobs and the knowledge that our idea was stolen from us. Just one more example how Billy the Block was ripped by the man. The moral of the story is to copyright every stupid thing you do, because you never know what will become of it"

There you have it, another tale of woe from everyone's favorite block. Hopefully the royalty check (actually some McDonald's gift certificates) I sent him will help convince him to write another story for us. We love you Billy!

Revisiting The Gaming Zone

by [Alan Hewston](#)

Tom's article 2 months ago was a good one about those games that put you into the "gaming zone". You may recall that the "gaming zone" is a state of mind where sometimes no one can reach you until - GAME OVER. Sure, you can leave at any time, but why kill off a good game - it may yield your all-time best score.

The game that really took me deep into the "gaming zone" in college and still can today, is

Turmoil. I used to really get into this game by playing the classical song "Flight of the Bumble-Bee". The song just hums away at warp speed and helped to get and keep me in the zone. The problem was that the song would end before the game does. For some dumb reason, I never bothered to make a cassette tape with this song back-to-back-to-back. Maybe I still can today. Such a fast song really isn't "needed" until about level 6 or so, where the action picks up. Until then, there is no value added.

Here are 10 more games that usually put me into the "gaming zone", or at least you need to put yourself into the "gaming zone" to score well.

11. Tapper - Absolute madness. Perhaps the ultimate classic game for keeping an eye on everything on the screen simultaneously. The sound effects take you that much more into the "zone", as you cannot stop to watch what you just did. You've gotta hear the action too. Tapper was the most often requested game by my college friends wanting to see me enter the "zone".

12. Kaboom! - Tom previously mentioned this great game, but left it off his top 10 list. Perhaps the best thing going is that you catch a break between levels. No need to stay in that zombie-like mode forever. OK - you can blink now. I love the fast games like Tapper and Turmoil, but have yet to enter the "zone" on Kaboom! I just plain suck.

13. Super Breakout - Unlike Kaboom!, once things get going, there is no escape until you die. I must congratulate my wife who has also entered the "zone" - but so far, only when playing Super Breakout.

14. Circus Atari - Similar to the above 2 paddles games, you've gotta stay focused here in order to keep scoring. Once the extra life is secured you can temporarily break from the "zone" and enjoy the game for a while.

15. Berzerk - You only need to be in the "gaming zone" for the first 5 seconds of each level. After that it is just hum drum.

16. Dodge 'Em - You better be perfect and make no mistakes. Good thing each level is over quickly. Can you imagine if after you cleared the board, all of the dots instantly returned again. You'd have to keep going until you finally crashed. Wow! Now that would be a neat variation. They'd have had to slow it down first and then gradually speed it up over time/levels.

17. Gyryss - That hypnotic music should pump you up, but it could put you into a deep trance too.

18. Squeeze Box - This often forgotten game doesn't last very long, so you must find the zone quickly and stay there.

19. Jr. / Ms. / Pac Man - Any one of these maze games can make you hold onto that stick for dear life. Sometimes that stick will hurt as you focus intently upon all the locations of the ghosts.

20. Taz & Fast Food - Quickly dodge the dynamite and purple pickels. Fast Food gives

you an break after each level but there's no break to be had in Taz.

Wow, some of these "zone" games can be quite painful to play. You can't play them too long or your hands will hurt. I promise to do some research into the "Pain Games" for an upcoming issue. Tom looks forward to reading this article which will definitely include Turmoil and Squeeze Box.

Having finally grown up (which is debatable) I must admit that we really do not NEED to visit the "gaming zone" all the time. A little videogame fix here and there usually holds me over. And, when I AM having a great game, or in the "gaming zone", my understanding wife will usually let me stay there for a while. But, if my presence in the Hewston household is needed (and especially if the game is going poorly) I quickly power down and give her my full attention.

Alan, a regular writer for Retrogaming Times has returned. He was unable to contribute two months ago due the death of his Father Donald.

Fortunately, Dad only had to suffer a battle with cancer 6 months before he went on to rest. Dad never cared for nor played any of my video games, but he had recently discovered Solitaire on his PC. [hewston95@stratos.net]

SX-64: the Tabletop that can break your hip

By [Geoff Voigt](#)

Every C64 collector wants one, a SX-64, "the Executive Computer" a tabletop version of the popular Commodore 64, and weighing in at about 35 pounds, this thing is anything but a laptop. I got my mitts on one of these puppies for my own collection, and took it's internal 1541 disk drive for a spin. Here's the lowdown on it:

It looks like a large grey technical suitcase or something the phone company might use at first glance, but once the front face is removed, it's in fact the keyboard; most people used to the C64 are unnerved at the lightness of the SX64 keyboard, because the CPU and everything else are in the main unit. This Commodore keyboard you can put on your lap without fear of your legs falling asleep.

After the connector cable is plugged into the keys and the main unit, you can see the 4" color screen, the face for the internal 1541 disk drive, the screen control panel hidden behind a hide-away latch in that classic mid-80's style, and a small storage unit for all the needed cables. Up top on the main unit is the cartridge slot, so when you have a cart in there, the label faces you, like a Colecovision. In back of the SX-64 are the user port, (for Voice Module, Modems, and networking) a external peripheral port (like the conventional C64, you daisy-chain pereph's), a port for an external monitor, the Power switch, and the two controller ports.

When you turn it on the first time, don't expect the familiar light-blue-on-dark-blue color scheme; instead there will be a dark blue on white, and the screen tells you you're using a SX-64, as if you had any confusion. the SX uses a different system update than the other series' of C64, taking out a few bugs from the internal ROM.

SIZE: (in inches) 14-1/2x5-1/4x15-1/2; and weighing 23 pounds; a far cry from today's 2 lb. laptops, the SX-64 can also double as a counterweight for lateral pulls in the gym.

PROS AND CONS:

Pros

A: First off, its semi-portability makes it good for when you need to get a C64 someplace else for a bit of hackery or game development, or (my personal favorite) transferring disk images from a remote location other than your own house.

B: While the built-in screen may only be 4" diagonal, its resolution is probably better than that of the Commodore 1701 or 1702 monitors most of us use for gaming; Dots on Pac-Man and Ms. Pac-Man are very clear and visible, Bullets on Jumpman and Jumpman Jr. are seen with no problems, and text is easy to read. The screen is a tube like that of normal computer monitors and televisions, so back lighting is not a problem; you can use it in the dark.

C: The whole thing folds up into itself in a square shape (minus the large, sturdy handle) that makes it easy to store.

D: Everyone loves to play with this; take yours to a collector's meet and watch everyone crowd around its small screen, playing classics like Archon and Zenjii.

Cons

A: You need AC power. This restricts the portability of the SX to where you can get to an outlet. A small splinter of memory reminds me that there was a company that made a battery pack for this, but the name eludes me at the moment.

B: There are necessary components that can get lost, the separate keyboard, the 21-pin cable that connects the keyboard to the main unit, power cable, the complimentary starter disk. You have to take a small inventory every time you put it away, and this also means that if you find one of these in a thrift, car boot, (for all our UK and EU readers) or swap meet, there's a running chance you won't have everything you need to play with it.

C: Certain software incompatibilities. Some Synapse games don't work, (Pharaoh's Curse, Shamus Case 2, Zaxxon; those are the ones I've tried) and cartridges might take a on/off or two to work; this one might just be a glitch of my own SX, however.

The bottom line is this: if you just want to be able to play the C64 games, get a normal C64 and a disk drive; that will cover you in full. But if you make a point in collecting Commodore, and/or unique classic gaming/computing stuff, feel free to get one and add it to your "cool items" shelf. Just don't be surprised if you don't dig it out but about once every 6 months or so.

(Geoff Voigt has returned to the RT writing staff after GAFIA for a month or so, and then getting derailed by many trade deals and a So-Cal collector's meet. Expect much more C64 stuff and Classic Gaming Op-Ed articles from him in the months to come. He is still at <gvoigt@ridgecrest.ca.us>)

Pac-Rat

by [Ben Valdes](#)

Pac-man variation called "Pac-Rat".

1. Pac-Rat runs through a maze, gobbling up classic videogame cartridges wherever he goes. He gets 10 points for each game he picks up and adds to his collection.

2. The center area of the playfield is called "E Bait", where four unscrupulous videogame resellers (symbolized by cans of SPAM) live.

They emerge from E Bait and chase Pac-rat through the maze. Their unrelenting mission is to catch Pac-Rat and persuade him into bidding on "Rare" videogames that they have for auction on E Bait. Their names are Flakey, Shakey, Snakey and Ripster.

3. If any of the E Bait resellers catches up to him, Pac-Rat will lose his life. Fortunately for Pac-Rat, he is a Classic Videogame Hero and is thus endowed with 3 additional lives.

4. When Pac-Rat reaches one of the 4 corners of the maze, he discovers a Thrift Store, one which he has never visited before. There he makes a "Big Score", finding an Extremely Rare videogame to add to his collection and giving him 500 points.

5. Making a Big Score gives Pac-Rat special powers to resist the temptations of E Bait resellers. The moment Pac-Rat makes his Big Score the resellers turn blue with fright and beat a hasty retreat. Pac-Rat has just discovered that "Rare" videogames are not nearly as rare as the resellers would like you to believe. They fear that Pac-Rat will now expose them for the shameless hypesters that they are.

This presents Pac-Rat with a real opportunity. If he can catch up to the now blue-with-fear resellers and expose them, he will garner the respect of his fellow collectors and earn additional points. He will get 50 points for the first reseller he catches, 100 points for the second, 150 for the third and 200 for the fourth.

6. Alas, the special powers that Pac-Rat gains from a Big Score are fleeting. A Big Score is inevitably followed by a Big Drought. As the thrill of the Big Score begins to fade, so too does Pac-Rat's ability to resist E Bait offers. The E Bait resellers quickly sense this, their original color returns, and they resume their relentless pursuit of Pac-Rat with new auction offerings.

7. From time to time bonus sprites appear and float through the maze.

These include Gold Bricks, Bira-Bira, a Chuckwagon, a Vectrex and other assorted goodies. Pac-Rat receives 100 bonus points for the first of these he can catch, 200 for the next, then 300 and so on.

8. When Pac-Rat clears out the entire maze, he sells his house and moves into another city where fresh territory (Your neighborhood, undoubtedly) presents a new maze for him to pick clean.

9. Two-Player Mode:

In two-player mode, Pac-Rat competes head to head with "SumGuy" for points and prizes. There is, however, an unfortunate bug in the program. The game will lock-up and die if Pac-Rat and SumGuy should ever meet, so it is best to avoid each other like the plague.

Pac-Rat is not yet completed, but the core of the coding is done and exists now in prototype form. Since this is a labor of love it may still be years before I finish it off. However, I do not wish to deprive the classic gaming community of what is already a great game. I will soon be making a limited production run of the completed core of this game. Unfortunately, my finances are tight. So if you would like to own the core of this great game then you must reserve a copy. Please send \$50.00 in unmarked tens and twenties to:

The Core
c/o Flakey, Shakey & Snakey LTD
1234 Osgood Way
Monet Toulouse, France

Ben is yet another classic videogame addict who continues to dream of the day when he finds that first prototype to add to his collection. If you have one that you want to trade, he would love to hear from you. Please drop him an e-mail at benandvicky@earthlink.net.

(Please note that this is a satire and the game doesn't actually exist. So please don't send money to the above address. This newsletter and the people who write for it, are not responsible for anyone stupid enough to send money to people named Flakey, Shakey and Snakey).

Tale of Two Joysticks

One of the highlights of the Classic Gaming Expo was the two different MAME joysticks and cabinets that were being shown. For this article, I will concentrate on the joystick as they are in more people's price range. While we all dream of an arcade cabinet, space and costs will keep most from ever achieving that goal. But a desktop joystick is a lot more possible and affordable.

HotRod

The first joystick, the Hotrod is the Cadillac of MAME supported joysticks. For the record, I am reviewing the SE version (that stands for Special Edition). This is the top of the line version they offer and for a mere \$20.00 more than the basic version, you get more buttons! Anyone who would spend the \$179.00 on the basic and not put out the extra \$20.00 to move up to the SE, is a fool in my opinion.

The SE version features two independent joysticks, four buttons per joystick, plus buttons for one or two player and buttons on the side that work as either a coin slot or as flippers in a pinball game. The joystick is colored blue and very sharp. The overall appearance is quite nice.

There are two joysticks, so games like Crazy Climber and Robotron can be played with

that arcade feel. There are four buttons per joystick and independent buttons for one and two player. A very nice feature is that there are one button on the right side and one on the left side of the joystick. These can be used to load in credits for the games or to give an accurate pinball feeling. This was a really cool feature and almost made me turn in the V-Stick and move up.

My only real gripe is that the joysticks were a little looser than my taste. I think this is more because I am used to the V-Stick and not really a knock against the sticks. If you never played the V-Stick, this probably wouldn't be a problem for you.

Another nice feature is that the stick will be upgradeable. They are planning a trackball and possibly a spinner and you will be able to connect these to the joystick, so your stick will not be obsolete.

The Hotrod SE joystick retails for \$199.00 and is worth the money. It is a good stick for the average gamer who wants to get more out of their emulators. With the upgradability, you will not be left out. It is made by a certified arcade company, Hanaho, and all the parts are solid and will give you years of quality play!

The HotRod joystick and cabinet can be ordered at the following website <http://www.hanaho.com/products/HotRodJoystick/>. There is currently a 30 day wait on them.

Arcade 2000

If the Hotrod is the Cadillac of joysticks, then the Arcade 2000 is the Rolls Royce of joysticks! This stick is an arcade gamer's dream! This is the first joystick that made me drool! It has every bell and whistle you could want and alot that you didn't even think of. Take a look at this list of features and tell me you don't want this stick:

The controls:

- *Two 8 way ball-top style arcade joysticks
- *Six player buttons for each joystick
- *One 4-way only ball-top style stick (Pac-man, Mr Do!, etc) for total accuracy
- *Two Arcade-quality tempest-style spinner (trackwheel)
- *One Arcade Centipede-style Trackball
- *Pinball flipper buttons on each side for pinball sims
- *8 Auxiliary buttons for Emulator & PC controls, etc.
- *Player 1 & 2 buttons

All controls are completely instantly re-programmable on-the-fly without any rebooting or hassle.

Can you say WOW! Add in that this stick will be customized to work with the PC, Playstation, Nintendo 64 and even the Dreamcast! So it doesn't have to be limited to your computer! Jeff and Andy, whose collaboration made the stick and cabinet possible are continuing to modify the stick to make sure that any game can be emulated perfectly. To give you an idea, I thought the joysticks were too short (you had to eagle claw them) and they immediately told me that the sticks could make them higher if a person wants. They

really showed a genuine concern to make sure the customer is satisfied with the joystick.

I tried it on various games, including two joystick games, trackball games and spinner games and I must say it performed like a champ! There were little hearts in my eyes and I think my wife got a bit jealous (I think it was jealousy in her eyes or was it disgust that her husband was drooling all over a joystick). It was a dream to play and I cannot say enough about it!

But there is a downside to the joystick. As you may guess, a joystick with this many features comes at a price. While there was no set price, Jeff said that it would be in the \$650.00-\$700.00 (this is an estimate, so keep that in mind) range for the top of the line joystick with all the bells and whistles! Sure it is a lot of money for a joystick, but you are getting a lot for the money! If you can afford the stick, there is no other choice! This stick will give you everything you could need or want!

(Due to a rash of complaints, the link to the site has been removed).

MAME Reviews

I was so excited by the new batch of games, with many of my dream games added, that I was ready to review them all! But then I loaded them and almost none of them worked. But a few did and so I reviewed one of them and decided to review another game I intended to review before. So get ready for two interesting games!



Son of Phoenix

While the game is a sequel of Phoenix, it has more in common with the shooters of the late 80's than with the original Phoenix arcade game. So if you go in with an open mind, you may enjoy the game, but if you go with preconceived notions due to the name, then you may be disappointed.

The similarities between this game and the original are there, but cosmetically they don't look the same. This one has a major upgrade in graphics, as one would expect from a game that is more recent. Instead of the barren background of the original, you get a planet in the background on level one and a base on level two. All the ships have

improved graphics as do the explosions.

The shield also exists in this game, but instead of always recharging as it does in the original, you have a set amount available to you. Use this up and you are one defenseless dude. So use that shield sparingly as it is much more vital in this incarnation. The ships and bullets are really flying.

Like the original, there are a variety of different ships coming at you. Most are airborne and swoop at you, sometimes it seems from out of thin air. There are also enemies that move on the ground, in a back and forth manner. These are much easier to take out. One problem is the enemies didn't have the personality of the original game. One of my favorite parts of the classic version is blowing those wings off the birds and how they could regenerate them. These ships are boring and devoid of personality. This takes some of the charm out of the game and lumps it with all the other shooters. Ho hum.

Another thing missing from the original game is the way your ship moves. While you can move up and down, as well as side to side, you are just another ship and move accordingly. But in the original, you had that almost wobble walk that was just too cool! It made the game instantly recognizable and once again added character to what essentially was a variation of Galaxian. Without these, the Son of Phoenix could have any name on it. Call it Space Shooter, Astro Zapper, Galactic Attacker, it doesn't matter as it has no heart.

In closing, they took a shooter with character and heart and modernized it and in the process, they homogenized it and made it yet another space shooter. Another example of how some games shouldn't have sequels as they are only ruined by it.



[Mystic Marathon](#)

Another of the many games that I completely forgot about. This game lasted at my local arcade for less than a month, a testament that gamers had no idea what a good game is. This little gem is another game that would have been nothing but a footnote, if MAME wasn't around to give it a second lease on life.

The game is pretty much what the title would suggest, a mystical race. You are a little gremlin like creature and you have to race a bunch of other ones to the finish line. Very simple as there are two commands, move with the joystick and jump with the fire button.

That's it! But there are a variety of obstacles to impede your progress from rocks you can trip over to trees that throw apples at you and they all add to the quirkiness of this little game.

While the static obstacles keep the game fun, the best part are the devious little creatures you are racing. These buggers will bump you into a hazard and slow you down. Cheating is actually encouraged in this game, so make sure to dish it back to them.

The race track is a series of islands that you must get across. Being islands, there is water between them and you have to swim it. As you can guess, swimming will slow you down, so look for the shortest route to improve your time. This adds a little strategy to the game and keeps things interesting. There are also some shortcuts that can speed the game up for you. In order to progress, you need to be ranked in the top three, so you better hurry. If you don't make the top three, the game is over and you have to start over.

Another example of the fun and bizarre games that littered our arcades in the 80's. But like many fun games, it was overlooked and soon forgotten to the general public. But with MAME, you can enjoy the game once more or experience it for the first time. It is a fun little game and one that is worthy of some of your time!

Classic Gamer Magazine - A Review

When I wasn't playing games at the CGE, I was checking out the various booths and one of them featured a new magazine aimed at classic gamers, hence the name Classic Gamer Magazine. Unlike the other fanzines and magazines I have seen for classic games, this one is printed on high quality paper and feature color! It really looks as professional as any magazine you would find at your local newsstand. The editor, Chris Cavanaugh, should be commended for elevating the visual quality of classic game literature, if nothing else.

So it looks good, but you ask how does it read? Well, the aim appears to be more at newer gamers, but the quality of the writing is very good and there is a good variety of subjects covered. Add in some very nice page layouts and great color pictures and you have the makings of a nice package. I was especially impressed with the writing of editor Chris Cavanaugh and especially Damien Quicksilver. Damien has already shown a writing style that makes his work stand out. He mixes in some attitude and it works well. This is not to detract from the other writers, I thought all of them did a good job, it was just that Damien caught my attention.

You may ask why I said the magazine appeared to be geared at new collectors? This is mainly because there were two beginner articles in the same mag, one dealing with the different rarity ratings and the other giving a crash course in some of the systems and terminology of classic systems by Lee Seitz of Classic Game Nexus fame. I personally have no problem with this and it could be useful to many newer collectors, but could be a turnoff to long time collectors.

The magazine is 50 pages long and it will keep you reading for a full evening. They do a good job of trying to cover many different systems, so that there is something for

everyone. Considering it is the first issue, I think they should be applauded for a top notch publication and I wish them all the luck in the world. The market is in need of a high quality publication and something that will reach out past the regulars and welcome in new gamers. I honestly believe if the magazine is given a fair chance, it will be successful, very successful. Let us hope that the sales are good enough to keep the magazine coming out at its quarterly schedule and hopefully in the future it will become bi-monthly or even monthly! Dare to dream! You can order the magazine from the following website <http://www.classicgamer.com>. Tell them you read about it in Retrogaming Times!

Tom's Bidding Blunder

I learned a lesson about eBay and I learned it the hard way. I was up late one night, working on the web page, when I was waiting for a page to save, so I did some surfing. I decided to check out eBay and see what late night bargains I could find. So I decided to type in some keywords. I started with Adventurevision and no luck. I then put in Activision to see if I could find a deal on some patches. As I was looking over the list of Activision auctions, I saw one that grabbed my eye "30 Atari2600 games from Activision". I saw the bid was only \$20.00, so I decided to check it out. Instead of reading the whole description as any smart bidder would do, I went right to the list of games. There was Cosmic Commuter, Private Eye and River Raid II among the games and I got excited! So excited that I went and put a bid of \$40.00 in. The auction had about 10 hours to go and I was headed to bed. After I put the bid in, I was the high bidder at \$20.50. So I happily went to bed.

The next day I woke up and went and checked out the internet. As I looked at eBay, I saw that I was still the high bidder on the games, so I clicked on it and went to check it out and see how much time was left. I saw that there was about an hour and half to go and it was sitting at \$20.50. Why was noone bidding on this? Maybe it was the title that had Atari2600 as one word, so it wouldn't show up in searches for Atari or maybe it was that it was in the Playstation section. So I decided to read the description to see if I missed something. So I read it and my face turned a whiter shade of pale. There were the words "30 Activision classics on the Playstation", yes it was the much despised compilation disk. What was I thinking?

For the next hour and a half, I prayed that noone would bid on the item. I knew with the high bid I put in that it was mine. I was not going to be outbid, there was noone dumber out there than me. My only hope was that noone made it a more painful experience than it already was. So the next long, agonizing hour and a half went by and someone must have been smiling on me, because it did not move. I was now the proud owner of this game. I thought for a minute on pulling my bid or not paying for it, but I know how much this irritates me and I always considered myself a man of my word and by bidding I was giving my word that I would pay for the item, so I had to take it.

I learned a lesson that night. That lesson was not to bid late at night when you are only half awake and strung out on Pepsi. I also learned to read the whole description and read it well. So maybe you will learn from my mistake and not get stuck with something you don't want. Anyone want to trade for it?

If I Can Do It, Anyone Can

by Fred Wagaman

All right, I can still count to 10. The house is still standing and the project is complete. It is now safe to tell my tale.

Little did I know that Tom's visit to my house in early May would have me embark on journey that many thought I would never survive. But first, a little background.

MAME is the "M"ulti "A"rcade "M"achine "E"mulator. It allows ROMS for many arcade games to be run on your PC. It is frequently updated to play newer and newer games.

I was introduced to MAME about 2 years ago. I thought it was cool to run some of the old classics on my PC, but since I didn't use my underpowered PC for gaming much, I moved on to other things. Over the last year or so, I've read some of Tom's reviews of MAME games here in Retrotimes. Back in January, I finally got a PC with a little horsepower. Then Tom came for a visit back in May.

Tom had me download the latest version of MAME prior to his arrival. He was bringing his "V-Stick" and wanted to give me a chance to try it. The V-Stick a dual joystick 8 button arcade-like control panel made for playing MAME on your PC. It's about 3 feet wide and weighs, I'd guess, about 15-20 pounds. Plugs into your keyboard port and you plug your keyboard into it. Very nice looking too.

After 2 minutes of Playing Robotron 2084 with this thing and I was sold. Joust, Crazy Climber and others played perfect. This was great. But I found that orders were no longer being taken. I turned to Tom and said, "I can make one of these".

A few days later, I saw a message in a news group that made that germ of an idea take a turn for the worse. A Robotron 2084 cabinet was for sale. \$25. And it was within easy driving distance. Uh Oh. An idea was forming in my head.

Forget making my own stick.

I'll make my own MAME cabinet.

So I picked up the cabinet the middle of May. It was a Robotron cabinet that had been turned into (gasp) a Crown's Golf game. There were stickers on the side, no monitor, a golf control panel and marquee and some Robotron guts still inside. The speaker grill was broken. I got it from Dave (Wacko) on rec.games.video.arcade.collecting. Turns out Dave and I did business about 10 years ago. Small world. Dave even threw in a second speaker panel to replace the broken one.

As time allowed, I did a little work on it. I wasn't sure of my abilities to do this, so I didn't go at it full-force at first. I ordered some replacement T-molding from Mark at the Basement arcade (www.basementarcade.com). Good stuff from a good guy at a reasonable price. Took off the stickers with a hair dryer and some patience. The sides were minimally damaged. Took out anything I found inside. Removed the marquee and control panel and

washed the cabinet down well. So far so good.

Bought a reasonably priced Robotron marquee from ebay.

So far I'm in about \$60 on this thing.

I thought I'd be able to replace the control panel on this cabinet. No dice. The control panel on the Robotron is made of three pieces of wood that are shaped into a nice smooth curve on the front of the machine. When this machine was converted to a golf game, someone took a jigsaw and cut a hole out of the control panel. This was going to be trouble.

I'll get into this more later.

As fate would have it, I received a flyer from Happ Controls (www.happcontrols.com) the beginning of June. They had a special going for a 19 inch VGA arcade shelf mounted monitor on sale. It was less than 1/2 the price of a PC monitor from Best Buy and should easily mount in the cabinet. Only drawback was it could only go to 640x480. Not a problem for the games I wanted to play.

Perfect.

I got a catalog from Happ and placed an order for the monitor, a couple of joysticks, a dozen or so buttons and trackball cover. It all arrived in a timely manner near the end of June.

I had extra equipment lying around the house that I began to pool for this project. A couple of 500 meg hard drives. An AMD K6 150 MHz motherboard with 32 meg of ram. I assembled it all into a case. I had an old PC trackball that we tried to replace the mouse with some years ago. And I got an old keyboard that was no longer needed from work.

The beginning of July found me moving some rooms around in the house, I needed to do something with the extra computer equipment. Rather than store it, I decided the time would be perfect to finish this project.

Time to go at it full force.

Heaven help me.

I had this project running on 3 fronts. The first was the game room. I moved the cabinet in there and started working on it. The second was my old office. I started working on the PC and the keyboard soldering in there. The last front was the basement. It was there I worked on the control panel.

The first thing I did was to try to install the monitor. There were 4 bolts in the cabinet to mount the monitor on. I was worried that the monitor wouldn't fit. If something went wrong here, I'll just pack it all up and give up. I lifted the 60 pound monitor into place and... it fit perfect. My confidence level soared.

I next decided to install the speakers. I carefully removed the old grill cover. I gutted a set

of PC speakers and mounted them on the speaker board. I took the speaker grill off of the second one that I had received. Turns out it was from a larger machine. So I carefully cut the molded grill cover and placed it on the board. Turned out well.

The control panel ended taking me more than a week to do. I peeled the old golf overlay from the control panel. I don't know what kind of adhesive they use on this thing. But I ended up like Wile E. Coyote from the Road Runner cartoons. My hand (and tools and everything else) would stick to this thing and it took significant effort to remove it.

Patching the 3 inch by 18 inch hole was going to be the biggest problem. It had to be done in such a way that I could drill through it and mount the buttons and joysticks on it. Oh yeah, it would also have to hold up to the beating that games like Robotron, Joust and Track & Field would put on it. I cut a piece of wood approximately the same size as the hole. I use wood putty to hold it in place and got a piece of "hardboard "(real thin, hard wood) that I put in to support it underneath.

What do you know ? It worked. Sounded simple, but took several days of lunch hours and evenings to get right.

The control panel already had 2 holes in it for buttons. They were the "Player 1" and "Player 2" from the original Robotron layout. I decided I would use them rather than patching them up. I took a Double Dragon control panel and used it as a template for the placement of the joysticks and 4 buttons that I wanted for each side of the controls. I needed to leave enough room in the middle for the trackball. Once it was laid out, I took a deep breath and began to drill the holes. All in all, it didn't turn out too bad. I used the trackball cover plate I purchased from Happ as additional support for the trackball. Since there was no room on the top of the control panel, I put 6 additional holes on the front. These buttons were for Player 1, Player 2, Coin, Exit, Controls and Pause.

How cool is it to have a Pause button on an arcade machine ?

Next I took a WWF Wrestlefest control panel overlay I had lying around and put it on. I would have loved to use a Robotron CPO, but I didn't need to spend another \$45 on this project. Plus I didn't know how the existing holes would match up to the holes I was putting in. I used an Xacto knife to trim the sides and open the holes for the joystick and buttons. I installed the controls and remounted the control panel on the cabinet.

I reused the monitor bezel that was in the machine. It needed a good cleaning and the golf sticker needed to be removed. I placed it in the cabinet and screwed it in place.

Whereas my woodworking skills are questionable, but passable on this project, the next phase required a skill I'm sorely lacking in.

Soldering.

I opened up the old keyboard, identified the keys I wanted to use and soldered the 44 wires necessary. 2 each were needed for each button or joystick direction. This took several evenings. There are things called keyboard encoders that would make this part of

the project unnecessary.

It is a circuit board that can be encoded to pretend that any key was pressed. These boards run \$40 - \$90. I'm cheap. Maybe next time.

Next I set up the PC. I decided to use the Arcade at Home Front end for MAME. Tim has done a great job and keeps it up to date with each MAME release. You can find it and daily emulation news at www.arcadeathome.com. The Arcade at Home front end is not freeware or shareware. It's beer-ware. To be registered user, send Tim a six-pack.

He also has his and many other MAME cabinets on display at his website. If you ever decide to do something like this, check here first.

OK. The PC is configured. The keyboard is wired. The control panel is in place. The monitor and speakers are ready to go. Will it work ?

Yep.

Plugged in all the wires to the PC. Plugged in all of the keyboard wires to the control panel (and hung the keyboard in the cabinet). I set the PC on top of the coin box and mounted a hinged board to hold it in place. I can reach the innards of the PC and can insert diskettes and CDs through the coin door. I mounted a 6 switch outlet just inside the door for ease of starting up. I put an "under the counter" fluorescent light behind the marquee to light it up. Placed Teflon coated feet on the bottom of the cabinet so it slides easily. Slid it into place in the game room. I've updated the ROMS, front-end and MAME several times already.

All in all, not counting the stuff (like the PC) I used that was setting around. I probably spent \$400 and 2 weeks of work on this project.

But not all is perfect.

The PC is a little underpowered for some of the games. Most older games are fine. But Zookeeper doesn't run to save it's life. I should have placed another button on the control panel for "ENTER". Changing some of the controls requires me to reach inside the coin door to press the "ENTER" key. Wouldn't be too bad if I had mounted the keyboard facing out. The wires went better with the keyboard facing the other way. Whoops.

I need to get a cover for the exit button. It's very easy to accidentally leave a game when you lean against the control panel. All these things will be taken care of someday. If I ever decide to open this thing up again. It's very hard to mess with something that's working.

Can you do this ?

Sure. Anyone can if I can. Get a cabinet, get a Happ catalog, go to the Arcade at Home website and let your imagination run wild. I did.

Fred Wagaman has been playing games for over 20 years and actively collecting for over 10. His 2400+ game collection takes up his office, game room and a good portion of his living room. He lives in Denver, PA with his understanding wife Jennie, 3 1/2 year old,

button loving son, Max and his latest addition, Lynzie. She was born August 12th and is sitting beside him as he writes this. What some people won't do to get another player for those 4 player games.

Overheard in the Newsgroups

There was still alot of talk about CGE in the newsgroup, but we have enough coverage of that this issue, so I will focus on other subjects. So read on to see the topics that prompted us to respond!

1. **1,036 Carts**-There was a guy in the newsgroup who was buying a collection of 1,036 classic video games for an average of \$0.50 each. There was guessing to what games may be part of that, how many rares and more importantly extremely rare games. Well, he got them and it turned out that they were mostly commons games, very common games. He ended up adding about 50 games to his collection and was stuck with the task of trying to move them to recoup his money. We wish him luck in his endeavor.

2. **Collecting vs Playing**-One of the hottest threads was the Collecting Old Games vs Playing Old Games. People talked about how some of them didn't get into the older systems as much and some who would buy two of every cart, one to play and one to collect. I think that is a very expensive way to collect, but more power to them.

EBay Notes

This month, I am taking a different direction with this article. Instead of talking about trends on eBay, I will talk about how to make more money and give yourself more spend able income for your classic carts. No, this isn't some sales gimmick or a pyramid scheme, it is just some advice.

When you are in search for classic video games, you go to garage sales, flea markets and thrift store, right? So while you are at these places, why not look for other items that you can sell on eBay for a profit? i am not talking about expensive items, but cheap ones that may yield you some good return. There is alot of potential out there, if you know what to look for. All you have to do is invest a little time and check out different categories on eBay and see what certain items go for and which are in demand. It isn't really hard and you may be able to find a few gems.

Here are a few of my gems that I have found and sold over the past few months. They helped pay for my trip to Vegas and gave me more spending money. Plus, I was able to buy some items for my own collection and not feel guilty about it.

1. 3 Hartland figures of the Lone Ranger, Wyatt Earp and a horse I picked up for \$1.00 total and sold for \$48.00.
2. A circus album that I bought for \$0.25 and sold for \$23.00.
3. 5 Transformer figures I bought for \$1.00 and sold for \$51.00.
4. A toy, tin train set that I bought for \$15.00 and sold for \$35.00

and the big one....

5. A Boyscout handbook from 1922 that I bought for \$2.00 and sold for \$141.00!

So for an investment of \$19.25, I yielded \$298.00 (before the eBay fees). So as you can see, there is gold out there, if you are willing to do some research. Plus, many of you are complaining about how expensive your hobby has gotten and how you don't like to sell classic games on eBay, so you can now have your cake and eat it too!

Conclusion

Because of all the extra stuff this issue, I didn't do some of the regular features. I hope you don't mind it and still enjoy the issue. Look for the next issue to be a celebration of sorts as we reach that milestone issue, #25! Not only is it the 25th issue we done, but it will be the first issue of our third year of publishing! Is that something to celebrate or what? So get your articles in early as this will be one solid issue! See you in thirty and look for an upcoming chat!

[Tom Zjaba](#)

(One of the pictures were taken from the Digital Press CD. Still a darn good deal! To get your own copy, go to <http://www.xnet.com/~skelly/> or <http://digitpress.com> and order one. This issue was done and redone as my computer is messing up, but at least I have the V-Stick fixed).

Retrogaming Times logo was designed by Patrick O'Neill.