

# **TOMORROW'S HEROES** **RETROGAMING** **TIMES**

The Newsletter for the Retro Gamer in All of Us

May 1998

## **Introduction**

Number nine, number nine. One issue away from the tenth issue! We are chugging along. I am finally getting requests to write for Retro Times. While noone has actually submitted anything yet, people have asked. That is a step in the right direction. Last month, I forgot the question of the month, but I will make sure to ask one this time. I enjoyed the Activision themed issue so much and decided to do it again, only this time with one of the other big third party companies, Parker Bros. You know the guys that did all the arcade and licensed games. So I will pay a little extra attention to them this issue. They are one of my favorites because of all the great games they brought to classic gaming.

## **Betting on a Dark Horse**

When I first read in a magazine about a new game system called the Colecovision, I was ecstatic. Real arcade graphics, Donkey Kong pack-in game and a converter to play all Atari 2600 games. What more could a person want. Not only did I want a system, but I thought about how I could get rich from the company. I figured that the stock would soar with such a superior system coming onto the market. But, being a minor, I could not purchase stock on my own. I had to sell my father on the idea. After my speech about the great potential of the company, he finally relented and allowed me to purchase 30 shares of the stock at \$18.50 a share, with my college fund. No great amount, but enough for me to keep a watchful eye on the stock market. Well, Wall Street didn't see things my way and my stock dropped from \$18.50 a share to a low of \$12.00. Needless to say, I was given a lecture on how to invest in the stock market and how foolish I had been. Not only from my father, but also my grandfather, who thought of video games as a waste.

But soon the Colecovision came out and like I predicted, it was a huge hit. Wall Street was also taking notice and soon the stock rebounded. Not a little, but alot. I finally sold my shares at \$40.00 each for a profit of \$21.50 a share or a total of about \$600.00 profit after transaction fees. But before anyone could crown me a genius, I did sell it too early. A month or so later, the stock split and went back up to \$40.00. I could have doubled my money. Why did I sell early? To buy a Colecovision and a copy of Zaxxon with the profits, of course.

I did later buy the stock again thinking the Coleco Adam was going to be a huge hit. I

was wrong, dead wrong and would have lost a bundle, except for one little thing. A little craze called the Cabbage Patch Dolls helped save me. I still have a stock certificate somewhere from Coleco that was later given to me as compensation for a lawsuit they had for tampering with the price of the stock or something. It was only for 5 shares and I never did sell it. I hope to find it one day and put it on the site. Now that is one collectible I will keep.

## **Lost that Loving Feeling**

In my youth and during early adulthood, one of my biggest thrills was hearing about one of my favorite arcade games being ported to a home console. I remember the thrill of waiting to play Asteroids, Donkey Kong, Zaxxon and many others during the classic era and even games like Ghost & Goblins and Golden Axe later. I would read the magazines to find out what was coming and look over the screen shots to see how close they would be. The excitement was great and I was like a kid at Christmas.

But something has happened in the last five or six years, I pretty much gave up going to arcades. The endless stream of fighting games and racing games just didn't catch my attention. It was hard to get excited about arcade ports when I couldn't stand most of the games. I think the last port I was excited about was Primal Rage, and only because I am a fan of stop motion animation.

The only game recently that piqued my interest was a one time playing of Rampage World Tour. I enjoyed the game and when I heard it was out for the Playstation, I was interested in it. Not foaming at the mouth like I was in my youth, but still interested. Will this feeling ever return? It is hard to say as the fighting game craze seems far from dead, ditto for the racing games.

## **Parker Bros, Bringing the Arcade Home**

While they didn't have the great original games like Activision or the unique games like Imagic, Parker Bros were the king of arcade and license translations. They brought many of our favorite games home and gave us a reason to stay home. Plus, unlike many companies they did versions for almost any computer or console of the classic era. And unlike Activision, they would make an improved version for the more powerful machines. Frogger, Q\*Bert and Star Wars, were only the tip of the iceberg for them. After they brought out the proven hits, they also went and brought out many of the great, but not so popular titles.

Along with great games, they also had some of the most interesting and successful advertisements. You would be hard pressed to pick up a game magazine or comic from the era and not see an ad for Frogger or Popeye. Catchy phrases and clever pictures made these ads as fun to read then as they are today. When it came to ads, Parker Bros took a back seat to noone.

While their arcade translations were quite good, their original games were not always so great. Clunkers like James Bond quickly come to mind. Even the Star Wars series, minus the arcade game, were only decent. Guess every company must have an Achilles heel. Frogger II was a good game, but I am unsure if it ever was an arcade game (don't think so, but I am far from the all-knowing). Spiderman was also a pretty good game, but unfortunately it was never ported to any other systems. I would have loved to see a Coleco version of the game.

The biggest disappoint with Parker Bros wasn't any of the games. It was the amount of games they advertised that were never released. Games like Lord of the Rings, Incredible Hulk and others that were cancelled due to the market crash. I for one would have loved to see these games and unless someone gets lucky and unearths one, they will just be pictures.

Here is a partial list of some of the great games that Parker Bros brought home. While there are numerous others, I just put the ones that came to mind: Q\*Bert, Q\*Bert Qubes, Frogger, Frogger II, Super Cobra, Gyruss, Spiderman, Popeye, Tutankham, Star Wars the Arcade Game, Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back, Amidar.

## **MAME REVIEWS**

A few new versions of MAME have come out and with them a slew of new games. Unfortunately, I haven't quite figured out how to get the new versions to work. So, I will continue to review games from the earlier versions. I hope by next issue to have a review of the previously unreleased Q\*Bert game.

## **Tapper**

One of my all-time favorite games is Tapper. The simplicity of sending those brewskis to the awaiting customers is an enjoyable experience. Nothing like serving happy, patient customers. At least for the first level. Then as the game progresses, the people get more and more plentiful and impatient. Soon your quiet little job get very hectic. Before you know it, you are sending beers everywhere and lots of empty glasses are coming back. If you don't hurry and get a beer to the guy at the end, he will hurt you real bad. Guess life as a bartender can be a bit dangerous. I don't remember any of this in "Cocktail".

It is good to have the original Tapper back. After not playing it for a decade and then only getting to play the Coleco version, I was happy to plug it into MAME. No more slinging root beers around. Like a bar would ever get that crowded if you were only serving root beer. We were kids, but we weren't stupid. I knew it was a beer game and so did everyone else. Don't advertise alcohol in the video games, but have the ads all over television. Oh well, at least now I can enjoy the original without any fears as I am of legal age. I want my Tapper with a frothy head on it!

How good is the MAME version? I didn't realize how good it was until I tried the Playstation version. First off, those controllers weren't meant for classic games. Secondly, the people are so small on there. I almost feel like Gulliver looking in on a tavern in Lilliput. But on MAME, the people are big and colorful! I cannot begin to tell you what a difference that makes to the game. Plus, for some odd reason I cannot get past the second stage on the Playstation. I don't know if it is me, the controllers or the game. But on MAME, I have reached the third stage and will get that fourth one! No aliens will go thirsty on my shift, no siree!

Once again, MAME comes to the rescue and saves me from playing an inferior version. I do like my Playstation, but it definitely wasn't made for classic games.

### **Domino Man**

This game is from the same people who did Tapper and the artwork is a dead giveaway. While the game concept is different, the art style is the same. Same big cartoony people and the same little touches of humor. This was another of the many games that had slipped from my memory before MAME brought it back.

Your job is to line up dominoes along the street. Why in the world would you want to do that in a fairly busy area is beyond me. Maybe your character just likes to cause trouble. Anyway, you have to set these up and keep them from being knocked down. Your opponents come in many shapes and sizes from little doggies to big bullies. You use your trusty domino to smack some and others you just push out of the way. A bit of a rude game, but an artist need to express himself.

There are multiple levels with you going into different areas like city streets and golf course. There are many different people moving around and this adds to the joy of the game. Another nice little touch is that at the end of the game, there is a poem that changes as you get a better score. A nice little touch that will keep you coming back to see all the poems.

Another fun little game that will force you to waste time and become unproductive. I do recommend giving it a go as it is fun. Not as good as Tapper, but not many games are.

### **Want a Good Classic Game Library?**

Out of the many game systems I have owned, one of the best systems for classic games has to be the Nintendo. Before you flame me, read on. I know it is thought of as the anti-Atari system and one responsible for taking the good old game industry from the hands of American companies like Atari and Mattel and instead began the age of the Japanese games systems that have dominated ever since. Sure it is the system that launched a thousand side scrolling clones. But it was also a great system for classic games and has as good if not a better classic game library than the Atari 7800.

I know that many of you hate the joypad and cannot imagine playing classic games with such a contraption, but there are some fine joysticks available for the system. With these you can get the feeling and don't have to put up with the uncomfortable 7800 joysticks for the two button games.

There is also the point that the 7800 is compatible with the 2600 and therefore has more classic games available for it. While that is true, the quality of some of the 2600 games is to be questioned. I mean besides MAME, the Nintendo was one of the few sources for some forgotten classic games. Games like Elevator Action and Donkey Kong 3 never appeared, at least to my knowledge on any classic system. While these may not be much to you, they are great games in my opinion. Also where else could you find Mappy and Dig Dug 2?

Check out this lineup and see if you can tell where I am coming from. Granted, some of these games were only available on multicarts. But multicarts are quite prevalent and the prices seem to have gone down some.

Here is the list of classic games: Antarctic Adventure (named Penguin Adventure), Arabian, Arkanoid, Bump n Jump, Burgertime., Defender 2, Dig Dug, Dig Dug 2, Donkey Kong, Donkey Kong Jr, Donkey Kong 3, Elevator Action, Frontline, Galaga, Galaxian, Gauntlet, Gauntlet II, Gyruss, Joust, Mappy, Mario Bros, Millipede, Ms Pacman, Pacland, Pacman, Pacmania, Pooyan, Popeye, Qix, Space Invaders, Xevious. I know there are some I am leaving out. Overall, I would take this selection over the 7800 library, which has Food Fight, Robotron and possibly the two player version of Centipede as the only missing gems not found in the Nintendo library.

Nintendo also offers a bunch of the neo-classic arcade hits like Klax, Rampart, Toobin, Paperboy, Marble Madness and others that have the feel and fun of a classic game. These are also some fun games that aren't generally available elsewhere. I know Klax is out for the 7800 and 2600, but they are extremely rare and expensive.

Then there is the stack of computer games from the classic era that have been ported. Games like MULE, Archon, Ultima, Bard's Tale and others are given a second life on the Nintendo. Another great reason to own the quite affordable system with a immense library.

Don't get me wrong, I like the 7800. I think it was a good system that just wasn't given a fair shake. I mean it sat in a warehouse for a few years before being released and was outdated when it finally saw the light of day. It was given a less than spectacular library and had almost no third party support. This is too bad as Atari had a huge library of games to update and could have had a real nice selection. But it is hard to win a race when one leg is tied and the competition has been given a big headstart.



To wrap this up, I think the Nintendo offers a great library of games for the classic game fan and enough other variety to be considered as another gaming option. My best advice is to find a top load system and get a good joystick. This will make the experience much more pleasant.

### **Question of the Month**

I missed it last month, but I am ready for it this month. My question is what game did you really want bad as a kid, but never got it, but when you returned to classic gaming, you made a point of finding this game?



The game I really wanted bad was Frogger II:Threedeep. I remember all the ads for the game. Everywhere I looked, I saw ads for the game. Being a big fan of the original, I really wanted to play the sequel. So when I returned to classic gaming I looked and looked for the Coleco version as it was my system of choice. When I finally did stumble onto one, I couldn't wait to get home and play it. While it wasn't as good as the original, it was still a fun game and one I really enjoyed. I guess I am still manipulated by ads.

### **Nickname Faux Pas**

As the classic video game market continues to grow, the days of video game shows and conventions are inevitable. With conventions will come guests as a drawing card. So to keep you from being embarrassed or insulting, I went to the different classic game characters and had them compile list of nicknames they do and don't

like. Americans love to give people and video characters cute little nicknames, mostly in good taste. But some can be insulting and even hurt a person's feelings. So to keep things friendly at upcoming shows, print off this list and keep it handy. It may save you from being chomped.

### **Pacman**

Acceptable Nicknames-Pacster, Smiley, The King, Chompinator, Chomp  
Unacceptable-Yellow Belly, Big Mouth, Mellow Yellow, KC Munchkin, Jaws

### **Ms Pacman**

Acceptable-First Lady of Video Games, Hotlips, Queen of dots  
Unacceptable-Mrs. Pacman, Pacman's Old Lady, curves, Pacman in drag

### **Q\*Bert**

Acceptable-The Supreme Noser, The Big Q, Snake Killer, Hopalong  
Unacceptable-Snozz, Flat Foot, Snake Bait, Foul Mouthed little brat, beak

### **Donkey Kong**

Acceptable-Kong, The Big One, DK, Sir, The Great Ape  
Unacceptable-dumb ape, Grape Ape, monkey, Mario's pet (really steams him)

### **Frogger**

Acceptable-Froggie, Lean, Mean and Green, Riveting Ribbiter  
Unacceptable-Budweiser Frog, Toad, Croak, Roadkill (he also hates to be asked why he cannot swim)



V-Stick, serious stick for serious gamers!

## **The V-Stick**

If you play MAME and I am sure many of you do, then you have faced the dilemma of trying to play classic games with modern joysticks. Needless to say, it usually is less than desirable. I mean how can you capture the arcade excitement that MAME offers with some lame joystick or even worse a joypad. So what is a classic gamer to do? Well, there is a solution and it is called the V-Stick! But before you rush over and buy one, let me give you the pros and cons.

### **Pros**

First and foremost the stick is sturdy, very sturdy like a tank. It is also big, being almost two feet across and weighing 8 pounds. We are not talking about any wimpy stick here. The V-Stick is made from the same materials as an arcade machine and it feels and works just like one. It really is a sight to behold. The best part is that it has two joysticks and eight buttons. So you can accurately play dual joystick games like Crazy Climber and Robotron the way they were meant to be played. If you tried playing either one with a keyboard, you know the frustration. Also with the ability to have four separate buttons for a single game, you can easily play classics like Defender that needs multiple buttons. This stick was especially designed for MAME and other emulators and it shows. It will quickly become one of your most cherished items and one of the first rescued from a burning house.

### **Cons**

As with anything in life, there are good and bad points. The biggest problem with the stick isn't really the stick, but rather the wait to get it. While they say the wait is 6-8 weeks on the web site, it is much longer than that. I had to wait about 15 weeks to finally get mine and I



can tell you that I was bouncing off the walls. I sent a few emails inquiring about its arrival and surely made a pest of myself. If you can handle the wait, it is well worth it. Seems there is a major backup in orders as the demand far outstrips the supply and being a small company they have trouble keeping up with orders.

The second problem is the cost. While it is costly, \$79.95 plus shipping, it is well worth it. The old saying, "You get what you pay for" applies here as it may cost alot, but you get alot of joystick for your money and a very sturdy and reliable one to boot.

So would I recommend it? I can easily answer YES! IF you are serious about your gaming, there is no better choice. It is a great stick that will keep you playing for years to come. Just be prepared for the wait, which may seem extreme, but will be worth it once the stick arrives. (The V-Stick people quit taking orders for them soon after this article).

### **The Many Faces of.....Pacman.**

Classic gaming's most popular character had many appearances during the classic era. He also had just as many sequels and even more clones. But the original game still has a certain charm. So this month we will rate three of the different versions of the same game. Which classic system has the best version?

**Gold Medal (Atari 5200)**-While the joystick takes a bit to get used to, it looks and plays quite well. The game really shines on this second generation machine.

**Silver Medal (Intellivision)**-This one won by default. With no version on the Atari 7800 or Coleco, it only had one other version to beat and that wasn't much competition. It plays alright, if you can handle the Intellivision controllers, which weren't made for games like this. The disc is very poor for handling mazes and you will lose some lives because of this.

**Bronze Medal (Atari 2600)**-A bronze medal is too good for this dog. It is only due to no other versions. This game is Pacman in name only.

### **Should There Be a Monthly Price Guide?**

I have seen alot of discussion in the newsgroups lately about a monthly price guide for video games. It seems that since every other collectible has their own regular price guide that this one should follow suit. Some people want to legitimize the hobby and feel a price guide is necessary. I personally couldn't disagree more. While a price guide would help the market grow, it wouldn't be a positive growth. For every person who wants to add something to the market, you would have a bunch of profiteers coming in and ruining the experience for everyone. Think you have trouble finding games at flea markets and thrift stores now, what do you think will happen when the flea market vendors get their hands on it? If you are in the market solely for money, then it will be fine for you. But if you like to have the ability to trade and the general friendliness that is still very common in this hobby, then you will hate this as those will become a thing of the past. Just look at the baseball card market. Go to a show and see how many kids are trading cards. They don't! Unlike my youth when we just collected the players and teams we liked and cared less about value, today's kids are more interested in who is hot and what cards are going up in

value. This will happen here too as many people will come in looking to make a fast buck.

The only advantage to the market becoming more known is that when more people realize that there is value to these games, alot of games that may have ended up in the garbage will be brought out and sold. Some of the lost games and prototypes will surface. There will also be alot more copies of almost all the games out there. But as good as this is, it will also mean there will be an overabundance of products once these people move onto the next hot thing.

While I know that a regularly published price guide is inevitable and that the market will be ruined, I cannot help but want to preserve it a little longer. I have made alot of friends in the industry and have done numerous trades. There is a certain magic that exists here that has been lost from most other hobbies. A magic that is part enthusiasm and part innocence. Games, much like toys once were, are still looked upon as a form of entertainment and nothing more. Look how people now buy toys and don't open them in fear that they will destroy their value. The same will eventually happen with video games. Once this notion is gone, so will the simple pleasure of video games. Then another part of our childhood will be destroyed.

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