

Retro Times 3

The Newsletter for the Retro Gamer in All of Us

November 1997

A Strange Story

I run an ad in a local newspaper to buy video games and I get a decent amount of response. One day I was visited by a man with a strange story and some even stranger stuff for sale. This man came into my store and approached me about buying some Coleco and Atari prototypes from Parker Bros. Of course, I was more than enthusiastic. He didn't have the chips (he said some were in carts with no label or a label that was generic and gave the basic info on the project, and there were numerous loose chips), but brought some photos to show the games. He said there was a total of approximately 50 carts and chips and many of the games were unfinished.

I inquired how he came into possession of the prototypes and he said that he was a janitor at Parker Bros and befriended one of the programmers. The programmer had secretly put aside a bunch of prototypes and many of the proposed games that were rejected by either Parker Bros or the companies that owned the licenses. Before the programmer was going to be laid off due to the downturn of the market, he gave these to the janitor to take out of the building and hold for him. Because of the programmer's status in the company, he feared that he would be searched and the games would never get out. But the janitor would never be searched and could easily sneak them through. The programmer was proud of many of the concepts that were rejected and refused to see them destroyed (as was company policy, according to him). So, the janitor snuck them out for the programmer and held them for him. But he never returned for them and since it has been more than a decade, he decided to try and sell them.

Now comes the interesting part. He said he knows since many of these are one of a kind, that they have value and he wanted \$5000.00 for all of them. He wanted me to pay him half ahead of time and the other half upon arrival. I told him that I wouldn't pay anything without seeing them and wondered if I could either go to his house or he bring them here for me to try. Five grand is a lot of money and I wasn't going to spend it blindly. He pulled out a handful of photos he had taken of the game screens to show the games. He had four photos, two from a sequel of Frogger called "Frogger in Time" (the game looked and played identically to Frogger, but it had different screens based on different times in history). The first photo showed frogger moving across a Medieval screen with jousting horses replacing the cars and a dragon that popped out of the castle you had to reach. You had to cross the moat to go to the castle with crocodiles among the logs. The second photo showed frogger moving across a Wild Western scene. This time it was buffaloes instead of cars and you had to reach the fort with Indians in canoes moving among the logs. He said these were the only two screens done before the game was rejected. Parker Bros decided that it was too much like the original and wanted to do something more innovative.

The other two photos were for a sequel to Popeye with a production name of "Popeye in the Land of the Goons". It played a lot like Pitfall II with Popeye going around Goon Island, dodging Goons and different animals in search of his shipmates. He had to find Olive, Sweet Pea, Wimpy and Pappy. Appearances by Brutus and the Sea Hag added to the troubles. Both games I saw were the Coleco versions and looked very nice. The Popeye game was also cancelled because of fear that the Goons weren't known enough and wouldn't help sell the game. They also feared because of their slow movements and odd shapes that people would think they were making fun of people with disfigurements and so they took the safe route and scrapped the game. According to this guy, the game was only completed up to rescuing Wimpy. After that, the game stopped and the rest was never completed.

While these photos were encouraging, the still didn't convince me to pay him without testing the carts. He said that he was fearful of having me come to his house because this was stolen merchandise and he didn't want to get in trouble. He would bring them to me, but was worried about something happening and wanted the money ahead of time as a show of good faith on my part. As much as I wanted to see the games, I had to decline and told him if he would bring the games to my store for me to test, then I would consider buying them. He said he would think about it and left. That was over six months ago.

I still haven't heard from him and don't expect to. While they may be real, I believe it was a scam. He probably programmed the games on a computer and then hooked it to a television. While the story was interesting and possibly plausible (the guy didn't seem smart enough to come up with the story on his own). My question to the gaming community is did anyone ever hear of these two games? I know he said they were rejected ideas, but maybe someone out there know a person who worked at Parker Bros and could either confirm or deny the existence of these games. The guy left no way for me to get in touch with him. Well, there is my strange story. Did I miss out on the classic gaming find of the decade or did I save myself from a major scam job? We probably will never know.

Imagic and the Intellivision

It seemed that every major gaming platform that was successful, had one 3rd party company that made an impact on the system. The Atari 2600 had Activision, Colecovision had Parker Bros, even newer ones like the Sega Genesis had Electronic Arts. On the Intellivision, that one was Imagic. As far as I know, nobody made more games for the Intellivision and no one made more unique and interesting games. Imagic was a company that wasn't afraid to take chances and their bravery has left us with a slew of fun and interesting games.

I am going to take this time to salute the company and their products that for me made the Intellivision a must have system from the classic era. Without Imagic, the Intellivision would have been a good system, but not a great one.

While Imagic did do a few knockoffs (Beauty & Beast was a lot like Donkey Kong, Demon Attack was like Phoenix, etc...), they usually put there own slant on the game. But where Imagic shined was their large selection of unique games, the ones that were unlike anything else out there. Games like Microsurgeon, Truckin and Dracula were as original as they came and provided hours of fun gameplay. What other company let you take on the roles of a vampire, a trucker and a microsurgeon? And this is only a small part of the whole picture. You also had bizarre games like White Water, Tropical Trouble and Ice Trek. Ice Trek alone had you make your way through a herd of caribou, pull together an ice bridge and more (I never got further than the ice bridge, so I have yet to see what happens next). Games that never got confused with anything else out there.

Imagic also gave us the only dungeon game not made by Intellivision and one with two player action, Swords & Serpents. Another fun game when you tired of the two D & D games (it wasn't until later that the incredible Towers of Doom came out). I think these were reasons enough to praise a company that is often overlooked. Hard to believe with the eye catching boxes in silver with the great covers. Below is a list of the Imagic games made for the Intellivision (if I miss any, please let me know):

IMAGIC GAMES FOR INTELLIVISION

Atlantis
Beauty & the Beast
Demon Attack
Dracula
Dragonfire
Fathom
Ice Trek
Microsurgeon

Moonsweeper
Nova Blast
Safecracker
Swords & Serpents
Tropical Trouble
Truckin
White Water

Video Game Reviews

Once again, I will review a few classic games that were made for the more modern systems. As always, these are only my opinions and yours may vary.

1. **Tempest 2000 (Grade A)**-The version I am reviewing is for the Atari Jaguar. What an incredible game! Not only is it one of my favorites, but it is my son, Alex's favorite. Because of him, I have put up some pretty good scores. Not only do you get the original, but also two updated versions and can play head to head. The Tempest 2000 mode is both a great challenge (just seeing things with all the stuff flying around) and a great game. The mix of visuals and audio has never been better in a game. My hats off to Jeff Minter who has continued to amaze me (I still remember how much I loved Llamatron on the Atari ST).

2. **Crazy Climber (Grade B+)**-This is the imported version for the Super Nintendo. It came on a cart with Frisky Tom and Moon Cresta. Another great find for me. I traded a handful of Coleco games for it and never once regretted it. It allowed me to get rid of the Crazy Climber I had for the Atari 2600. You get an identical version of the arcade classic of each of the games and an updated version which is the same game, but sports new graphics. With Crazy Climber, I prefer the classic version. The only flaw with the game was the controls. It took me quite awhile to get used to move my climber with a joystick. Many climbers fell to their death while I figured it out. But now I can make my way around the game. I still cannot do as well as I did at the arcade (I know this because I played a version at Videotopia and did eons better). But it is as close as I can get until I find an arcade machine to buy.

3. **Ms Pacman (Grade B)**-This version is for the Sega Genesis. Another classic reproduced on a new machine. What makes this game worth owning is the different version and especially the two player version. My wife and myself had a field day with it and it adds new life to the game. The only flaw in the two player mode is if you play on anything other than the small mazes, you will have problems when one of you is at the top and the other is at the bottom. This can really frustrate you when you competitor gets you stuck at the bottom and you get killed. Besides this, it is a great game and you get 36 different mazes. Everything else from the arcade game is there like the animations and bouncing prizes.

Sympathy for the Serpent

One of the saddest characters in the classic video game market has to be Coiley. The poor snake from Q*Bert is forced to suffer an eternity of being duped off the pyramid by Q*Bert. I don't know about you, but I feel pity for this poor creature. Not since Wiley Coyote has a cartoon character suffered so much. The poor snake keeps dying and being reincarnated to go through it all over again. If this isn't bad enough, he always hatches as an adult. So he never gets to enjoy a decent childhood. Nature was cruel to this poor creature and he deserves our pity.

If this wasn't enough, he then gets slighted in the sequel. He gets replaced by a rodent, which is a snake's true prey. Can you think of any worse insult? This is truly a character who received no respect. So let us take a moment to thank Coiley for his personal sacrifice and maybe sometime when you are play Q*Bert, let the poor snake make a kill. It is the least we can do.

Correction

Last month, I did a piece on games I would like to see on the Atari 7800 and one of them was Tempest. In the piece, I said that the 7800 would have the power to do a game like that, unlike the 2600. Well, I was corrected. Appears that there was a proto of the game made for the 2600 and for the 5200. While no one has actually played either game, there are photos of them out there as proof. I thought that there was on a box made for the Atari 2600 and that they gave up on the actual game. Well, I stand corrected. Please let me know of any errors I make, as I am only human.

Question of the Month

Once again, here is the much vaunted question of the month. Maybe one day I will get some responses to this. While I have received a lot of feedback for the newsletter (mostly positive, thanks), no one has taken the time to send in their answers. So I am begging you to please send me something. Enough groveling and onto the question of the month:

With the increase of classic games being redone, what classic game would you like to see be redone and what would you want added?

I had to think about this game a lot because there are so many great games that I would like to see be redone. After much thought, I chose Antarctic Adventure. While there was a Nintendo version, it was basically the same as the Coleco version. My updated version would remain true to the game, but first the graphics would be improved. There would be different graphics for the different stages and animations in the background. I would add some sound effects like gusting winds and splashes when you fell in a ice hole. I would vary the enemies that came out of the ice. While they would essentially do the same thing, I think it would be more interesting if you had seals, walruses and polar bears (I know they don't live in Antarctica, but who cares). I would also vary the fishes that popped up from the ice. But the two biggest addition I would add would be a two person race version with split screens. You could also sorta nudge the person into an ice hole. Plus, the person who finished first would get more bonus and extra time on the next stage. The last thing I would add would be something similar to Galaga. I would have it keep track of how many flags you grabbed and how many fish you grabbed. You would get a big bonus if you grabbed all the flags on a level. This could add more life to the game. It would also record the best times, so you would have a goal.

The Grand Finish

Another issue of Retro Times comes to a close. I hoped you enjoyed it and please give me your feedback. It is just my little way to give something back to the gaming community that has given so much to me. Your submissions are always accepted. Good bye and good gaming.

[Tom Zjaba](#)