

# Retrogaming Times

## Monthly

Issue #40 - September 2007

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### Attract Mode

by [Scott Jacobi](#)

As you can see, issue 40 is a bit of a milestone for us, so we're celebrating. But we're not just here to celebrate our own accomplishment. We're celebrating something that, honestly, we celebrate every month: your continued support and enjoyment of retrogaming. I had an interesting discussion with a coworker one day. I described myself to him as not only a gamer, but as a retrogamer. And his response was, "What does that even mean?" At first, I thought the answer was pretty obvious, but I thought about it a little bit, and I realized something.

You know those people who can rattle off every baseball stat for every player from a given year? Or those people who can identify the name of the song, and the band that played it, and which album it appeared on for a certain time period? Well, I'm like that with video games, and I'm willing to bet many of you are too. But we don't call those people retro-baseball fans, or retro-musicians. So it's kind of an interesting phenomenon that we label ourselves "retrogamers." What exactly does that mean?

The immediate, off-the-cuff response, is that we are player who enjoy playing games. But not just any games. We go out of our way to define ourselves as players who prefer to buck the "modern" trend, and play games that are older. In a hobby that's driven by technology, and where the marketing that accompanies it advertises that "newer is better," and "faster and bigger are the only things worth playing," we consistently defy those claims and gravitate to games that are considered passé. Either we prefer the game play offered by these older games, or we enjoy the feeling that we get from playing games that we played during simpler times in our lives.

But look at the connoisseurs of music or movies, people whose opinions of why things were better in the past are considered academic, or the subject of a thesis. They don't necessarily suffer from the same stigma of being "stuck in the past" like some retrogamers do. To the best of my knowledge, no one has written a thesis about how Pac-Man revolutionized the arcade scene (although I'd be very

happy to be proven wrong.) So what makes our experience, appreciating the classics of our medium of choice, so much different than others?

I think from the outside looking in, many people see our hobby as a hobby of technology. A hobby that grows and improves with each generation, leaving the previous generation behind in the dust. It's not as common to come across a fan of music who prefers vinyl to digital, but you can find them, and even most fans of digital can understand the benefits to using record players every once in a while. But to the average person, playing an Atari 2600 is akin to using a BetaMax to watch movies. It simply isn't done. It will be long time until video games have been around long enough, and the ranks of retrogamers will swell to the point where we're a lot more common and our medium is better understood. Until then, always know that you can come here each month for a little bit of nostalgia and fellow appreciation for our "outdated" games.



### *Interview with our "Retrogaming Times" Founder - Tom Zjaba*

*by Alan Hewston*

As many of you know, Tom Zjaba founded the "Retrogaming Times" and allowed us to continue on in his spirit, with just a slight name change to become the "Retrogaming Times Monthly". About 9 years ago this Summer I met Tom Zjaba at his Lakewood, Ohio store named Tomorrow's Heroes. His store was brought to my attention by my office mate at that time, and a mutual friend. He knew that I liked video games and that I had to check out the store and meet Tom. He was right. I was amazed at all that Tom had for sale and never would have dreamed how many game cartridges that I'd have today, or that I'd still be writing for his newsletter 8+ years later.

Tom warned me way back when not to get too much into the hobby too fast, or that I'd get burned out. I'm not quite burned out, but I clearly don't have as much free time to dedicate to my hobby as I used to or want to. Much of what I have learned about collecting classic video games, the systems, manuals, books, and a lot about the games I've played and that I've written about, or in some way helped others with - - - I need to give a whole lot of credit to Tom for his help getting me started. His generosity, inspiration, and of course, a format for me to contribute to give back to the hobby and gaming community. I'm sure that Tom's efforts have helped many gamers, collectors, dealers and those of us who are a little bit of all three of those to enjoy classic videogames all the more. Thanks a bunch Tom.

When kicking around ideas for this 10th anniversary of his magazine, I realized that Tom has not been interviewed in any magazine. So . . . why not interview Tom and let him help to fill this issue with some of the good memories we have of the past 120 months of Retrogaming Madness. Tom told us quite a lot in those first 80 issues, but we know that there is much more that Tom can tell us about those days gone by, and what he has been doing since.

**RTM:** Tom. Tell us how your store front, "Tomorrow's Heroes" got started and what merchandise you carried and how that changed over time, plus of course tell us about the newsletters that you wrote:

**TZ:** Without doing a whole history lesson, I will give the brief history of Tomorrow's Heroes. As a storefront, it opened in 1985 in Lakewood, OH. It originally was opened by my father and uncle as B & L Comics. I ran it from 1985 to 1992, when I bought it outright and changed the name to Tomorrow's Heroes. At the time, we carried comic books and trading cards, with the emphasis on sports cards. I saw the decline in sports cards coming and proceeded to liquidate that portion of the business. Turned out to be a good move as the market for sports cards soon declined. I then went into renting Japanimation and Hong Kong action videos. I was a fan of Japanimation and could not find a place that rented them. Blockbuster and other chains carried maybe 10-12 of the most popular

movies and that was it. So I took my own collection and started renting it. I found there was a big market for it and tried to fill the need. I also got into collectible card games, namely Magic the Gathering early on and did very well with it. Later, I started to sell classic video games. It was more because I had some space in the store and had a ton of duplicates in my personal collection. One of the things that happens if you collect for a period of time is you build up a lot of duplicates. Most the time when you go to a flea market or a garage sale, the person is selling an Atari with 30 games and wants to sell it as a package. You need maybe four or five games and end up with a bunch of duplicates. So I decided to see how they would sell at the store. My best seller was packaging an Atari 2600 system with two joysticks, a set of paddles and ten games. I would put popular games in there that people remembered from their youth. Games like Space Invaders, Asteroids and Warlords. I remember one person buying one and taking it to a hotel party they were having for a high school reunion. I gave him some business cards to hand out as well and it went over so well, I ended up selling another five systems from people who played it and wanted one.

**RTM:** When did you actually start your web site [www.tomheroes.com](http://www.tomheroes.com), and was it partly due to advertising potential, online sales, to showcase your newsletters and love of the hobbies, or some or all of the above?

**TZ:** Tomorrow's Heroes the website was officially opened in February of 1997. I knew at the time that I was going to close the store front the next year and wanted to turn it into a home business. I figured I would need a year to get the website up and to start adding all of the inventory to it.

My oldest son, Alex, was diagnosed with autism and we needed to have someone take him to various therapy and doctor visits. It was getting to a point where we had to make a decision. That is when I decided to close the store and go online with it. Since my wife's job had the health insurance as well as being a well paying job, we made the decision that I would be a stay at home dad. So in 1998, I closed the store for good. And for the next three years, I stayed at home and help raise my three sons as well as take them to multiple therapy visits per week.

**RTM:** What monthly magazines (Just Newsprint?) or flyers did you publish or contribute to at your store or online? Tell us a little about the chronology and content of them.

**TZ:** The first newsletter I ever did was a newsletter I gave away at the store. It was named Tomorrow's News and it ran for 50 issues. It went from a small couple page newsletter put together on an Atari ST to later being a slickly produced newsletter done on a Macintosh. At its peak, we were printing about 500 copies a month and sending copies to most of the major comic companies. Marvel, DC, Image, Wizard and others asked for copies and we sent them each month. And we even received an award from Capital City Distributors that gave us an award for best comic newsletter. On the website, I started with Retrogaming Times. I wanted a classic video game newsletter as a way to give something back to the classic video game community. At the time, it was a small but dedicated group of people. There were people like Sean Kelly making multi-carts and Joe Santulli publishing Digital Press and Lee Seitz with his Classic Video Game Nexus. They were all contributing something to the community. I thought about what I could do and I knew that I could not program new games like John Dondzila was doing for the Vectrex or Piero Cavina did with Oyston. But I could write and I decided to make a free online newsletter about video games. It would be a place for anyone who wanted to write about video game. And so Retrogaming Times was born! Later, I did Just Newsprint as a comic newsletter, but it never really took off. It went 25 issues, but it was not as well received. I also did Bit Age Times as a companion newsletter to Retrogaming Times, but it also never really took off. It last 20 issues.

**RTM:** What are your favorite articles and characters or interviews from the Retrogaming Times? This can be from things that you wrote or by fellow contributors.

**TZ:** With so many articles and interviews over the 80 issues, it is hard to pinpoint a few. But as far as

interviews, I liked talking to people who were working on a project. The home brew programmers or authors of books. There are lots of interviews over the internet from the big names of video games, but at the time there really wasn't a place for the new generation of programmers and writers. I also enjoyed the one with Warren Davis of Q\*Bert fame. I especially liked when I got to meet him at the CGE and talk to him about the game. As far as articles, I liked when I asked people where they were from. I received so many responses and still do to this day that it is amazing. It really was a good feeling to see how many different countries readers of the newsletter came from. I liked doing articles that were different. I know that reviews are a big part of any video game newsletter or magazine and I always had an abundance of contributors for that. That is why I tried to do different types of articles. A way to balance it so the newsletter wasn't just reviews and plugs. I am partial to the Video Game Therapy articles and I like the ones I wrote about Billy the Block. What I liked most about the newsletter was the large number of writers who contributed to it. This made the newsletter just as fresh and exciting for me as for the readers. We had so many people contributing all kinds of articles that I always had fun reading them. It was so much work putting it together, that outside of proofreading, I really didn't get to read the newsletter until a week after it was done. Then I would print it off and sit down and enjoy it.

**RTM:** Do you care to rehash some of how the hobby changed in 10 years. How ebay and the "someguy"s and their impact on your interest in the hobby as a player, collector and dealer (merchant)?

**TZ:** The hobby has changed a lot. Some for good and some not so good. A big difference in the early days is the community was small. There was maybe a few hundred classic video game websites, if that many. And you got to know everyone. There was a lot of trading back then. But now the internet is so huge and there are thousands of classic video game sites, with new ones popping up daily. So it is so overwhelming. Ebay can be a blessing or a curse, depends on who you talk to. On one hand, it has made it easy for a person to amass a large collection of classic video games with minimal effort. And it has driven down the price of video games. But on the other hand, it has also made it much harder to find games at flea markets or garage sales. I remember when I first got back into collecting video games. It was 1992 and I could go to the Memphis Flea Market and find a ton of classic video games to choose from. I remember going to garage sales and you would find something at about every fifth garage sale. But now you can go to twenty garage sales before finding a single pong unit or Pac-Man cart.

**RTM:** You used your marketing skills quite a bit and worked them into your favorite hobbies and continued to do so many times over the years. The "Retrogaming Times" itself obviously helped to bring in some customers and hits. Tell us about marketing and keeping track of web site hits and making adjustments to improve things and be even more successful.

**TZ:** One thing I learned about the internet is that you cannot just put a site on the web and sell comic books or video games and expect to do well. You need to get people to your website and there are one of two ways you can do this. The first way is to spend a lot of money on advertising. Paying for banner ads on popular sites or now buying keywords on Google or Yahoo. Or you can do it the way I did. Create a lot of content and give people a reason to want to come to the site and more importantly, to want to return and tell friends about it. This way is time consuming but it is more affordable and longer lasting. The Retrogaming Times went well beyond my expectations. At its peak, it was reaching over 5,000 readers a month. And I had a dozen sites posting about a new issue. I remember how often I would spotlight a video game site and then I would receive an email of thanks because I sent so many people to their site. I really liked that I was able to use the newsletter not just to promote my site, but also so many other sites as well as video game shows, homebrew video games and other stuff. One thing I would love to do but don't really have the time or the talent, is to redesign the Retrogaming Times newsletters to make them slicker looking. I dabbled a little bit when I did my Retrogaming Times 1/2 issues that I handed out a video game shows. But I never was able to do it and transfer it to the website. Another thing I learned and need to incorporate in the

website more is proper use of meta tags. Putting good titles for the pages as well as descriptions and keywords.

**RTM:** What things have you added to the Tomorrows Heroes website in the past couple years? Are these mostly reviews for video games? And also tell us about your new web sites, one of them being [www.arcadeafterdark.com](http://www.arcadeafterdark.com).

**TZ:** Right now, most of the stuff I add on the website are pictures. I have been slowly adding box scans of all the classic games. I added almost all the Colecovision, Atari 5200 and Atari 7800. I am working on doing the 2600 next. I also have been adding a lot of comic book covers as well as comic book ads. I also try to regularly write for my video game blog, which actually gets quite a bit of interest. A little over a year ago, I decided to do a different website. One problem with Tomorrow's Heroes is that the site is so huge in size that something new gets lost. The site has over 3,000 pages and it is hard to make something stand out. So I decided to go with a new website. The first one I did is called Arcade After Dark (<http://arcadeafterdark.com>) and it is a video game based site. But unlike Tomorrow's Heroes, it is mostly comic strips about video game characters. Right now I do five different comic strips. The main one is called On Tapp and it features the bartender from Tapper. It is the bar where all the video game characters come and visit. The strips are generally one page long with eight panels. The visitors range from classic characters like Q\*Bert, Pac-Man and Donkey Kong to newer ones like Lara Croft, Sam Fisher and Chun Li. The second strip I did is called Jr Critics and it features Donkey Kong Jr and Jr Pac-Man. They both go into bad video games and make fun of them. Think of it as Mystery Science Theatre 3000 for video games. These go anywhere from 3 to 6 pages long. The third strip and most recently the most popular is called "What They're Thinking." It goes into the mind of video game characters and talks about what they are thinking. They are humorous looks at what a video game character is thinking. These are one page long. The fourth one is taking my Video Game Therapy and turning them into comic strips. I have done four so far and am looking into doing the rest. I am also considering changing the format on it. The last one is my newest strip. It is called Troll and Stick. It features two teenage boys, who you don't see but are just represented by word balloons. They talk about video games and make fun of each other. Troll is short for Controller and he is into new games. He loves games like Grand Theft Auto and Halo. Stick is short for joystick and he loves classic games. His dad is a video game collector and he loves playing games like Pac-Man and Donkey Kong. They argue about which games are better, the new game or the classic games. These are anywhere from 2 to 4 pages long.

I also created a third site. It is called KZ Comics (<http://kzcomics.com>). It is a tribute site to a comic company I created back in the 1980's. It was short lived but I wanted to keep its memory alive. I also use it as a place to put up my various stories I write. I have a section call Prose Stories that features about 10 stories that I have either finished or are working on.

**RTM:** Wow, that's quite a lot. And you've had a chance to review games beside what you have told us inside the pages of the RT. In fact, you've received free games or were paid to review games and then also to write a bit for other magazines as well. Tell us what systems you have reviewed for and of course, got paid to have fun?

**TZ:** I worked for a few sites doing reviews of video games. The one I did the most for was called All Games. They were later bought up by the company that owned G4 Channel and they closed the website. But the reviews are still out there. I did a lot of the games no one else wanted to do. There was always a list of games that were available for review and all the kids games were never taken. So I did a lot of them. One of the better reviews I did and my editor emailed me and said he loved it was for Hey You! Pikachu. He said that so many people just blasted the game and did not give it a chance. But when I reviewed it, I talked about how it could be a good bonding experience for a parent and a child. If you google my name, you will find those reviews still up on the internet. I also wrote for two different video game magazines. I wrote for the now defunct Classic Gamer magazine. That lasted three months before they stopped production. I now write for Video Game Collector, which is

on issue #7. I have written for 6 of the 7 issues and usually have two articles. I also wrote for numerous other sites. Most were video game related. But I really don't do much writing on the internet, unless it is a paid position. I have grown tired of writing numerous articles for a website and then the site goes under or they change format and all the stuff I wrote is gone. The worst was a website that dealt with Geauga Lake, a local amusement park. When it was a Six Flags park, I wrote a half a dozen articles for the site. When Cedar Fair later bought it from Six Flags and changed the name back to Geauga Lake, the site owner got rid of all the old articles and started over. After that, I said if it is not in print (ie: magazine) or if it does not pay money, then I generally don't bother with it. I would rather write on my sites, where I know I can keep the stuff up.

**RTM:** Did you think the RTM would last this long, and are you happy with what we have done and kept the torch going.

**TZ:** I was surprised when I made it to 50 issues, let alone making it to 80 issues. But to see you guys do another 40 issues is amazing. I am not sure how long you guys will go, but you have done awesome. I must say that I am happy with the job at RTM. You kept the feel of Retrogaming Times and especially creating a place for any video gamer to come and write. About the only thing I would like to see in RTM is more personal stories. I like to read about people's childhood and their first encounter with a video game or getting a system for Christmas. Reviews are fine, but I really like to read about how video games have impacted people's lives.

**RTM:** Hopefully our readers can send Scott and I some good stories like that. We'd love to print them. So . . . Do you get to play game a lot with your family now that the children are older? What does your family play today? And do you find time to play as much as you used to?

**TZ:** We do play games as a family. Not as much as I would like, but my kids are more into creating amusement parks with the Roller Coaster Tycoon series. Most of the family game playing is on the Dreamcast. It is still one of my all-time favorite systems. We love playing multiplayer Bomberman and Ooga Booga. And having fun with Sega Bass and Marine Fishing is always a good time. Add in Soul Calibur and Crazy Taxi and you have a full night of gaming. We also break out the Devastator II arcade controller and play some two player games on MAME. Simpsons is a favorite. I do not play as much as I once did, but I still enjoy playing video games here and there. But to be honest, I enjoy making the comic strips on Arcade After Dark more. I get a satisfaction out of starting with a punch line and turning it into a comic strip.

**RTM:** What is your interest in the videogaming hobby today? How many arcade marquee's and collectibles do you have? Do you still find time to look for second hand stuff that you can resell? Surf ebay? Read the newsgroups? Read blogs? Keep up with Digital Press and AtariAge?

**TZ:** I do not really collect anymore. When we were having a legal battle with the school system to get my son Alex into a better program, I had to sell off most of my collection to pay for legal fees as well as bringing in specialists and different medical and neurological tests that were not covered by insurance. So I sold off all my video games (which were at the time, about 800 different carts) as well as my handheld/tabletop collection (which was over 100 different ones), Activision patches, magazine collection and some of the memorabilia collection. All I really kept were my marquee's and my video game board games. While it hurt to sell them at the time, it was well worth it. We were able to win and get him in a good program. It was the difference of having our son at home as opposed to having him put in an institution. There is little I miss from my collection now. I do plan on one day buying a Vectrex again. But otherwise, I feel I am a better man without all it. Sometimes when you lose something that is dear to you, it makes you appreciate what you have more. I have not sold on ebay in years. I bought a total of one item on ebay last year. To be honest, I find the site dull. Too many items starting at high prices. Too much of the same thing. Too many pages to navigate. I miss the early days of ebay (I have been a member since 1996) when all the video games were in one section. It made it easy to find stuff you never heard of before. But now, you put in "video games"



and get a million items. I do go to some sites regularly. I stop by Atari Age and Digital Press occasionally. But I don't really talk in any newsgroups or bulletin boards. I found there are too many people who just like to cause trouble. That and too much spam, which is one of the reasons I don't bother with any bulletin boards on any of my sites.

**RTM:** Any thoughts on the future of games? Have you looked back at any of the predictions you made from the past and did you predict well or badly, on where games would go, or what systems would do well?

**TZ:** I think video games are headed to becoming virtual. What I mean is I think the days of buying a video game at a store will come to an end. Down the road, video games will be paid for and then downloaded. It will take some time for this to happen as internet speeds are not fast enough, but it is coming. Or if they do have video game stores, it will be where you take a card in and they download the game onto it and you pay for it. Then you can keep using the same card as the game will then load onto your hard drive. As far as predictions, I like how some of the ideas I had for video games were later made into actual games. I talked about a Warriors game back in January of 2002. I had an idea for a game called Monster Hunter back in the fall of 2002 (both were discussed in Bit Age Times). Granted mine sounded better than the one that Capcom did. Too bad they did not do one for my Sega Amazon Fishing

**RTM:** Tom it was great to catch up with you, and we hope that can keep writing for us from time to time as well. Thanks again and also for the great articles that you added this month for this special 10th anniversary issue.

**TZ:** Congrats on reaching the milestone! You guys have done a great job with the newsletter. I will try to send an article when I can. I do read the newsletter each month and enjoy them.



***Happy 10th Anniversary***

***by Donald Lee***

Retrogaming Times Monthly (and it's predecessor Retrogaming Times) is celebrating its 10th Anniversary. As I've been writing here for less than a year, it's a little difficult for me to do a retrospective on the magazine. I haven't been around all that long.

However, I will mention that it's been a blessing for me to discover the magazine some years ago. I'm a bit of a history buff and watch the History Channel. I've read various biographies of individuals and companies over the years. Also, shows like VH1's "I Love the 80's" and "Behind the Music" are great favorites.

Reading Retrogaming Times Monthly (and later the archives of Retrogaming Times) was the video game equivalent of going down memory lane. Reading other people's feelings about various systems and games, especially the 80's era (Coleco, Atari 2600, etc.) was a great experience. I realized I wasn't the only one who was nostalgic about the older generation of games and systems.

Deciding to write for Retrogaming Times Monthly almost a year ago was a tough decision. The magazine had lost a few writers and had thinned down a bit. I was reluctant to commit to writing mainly because it takes time to organize your thoughts and write them down. Most (if not all the writers) work full time and presumably have families or other things to do.

Ultimately, I decided to write for Retrogaming Times Monthly because I wanted to accomplish two things. I wanted to "keep a good thing" going with the magazine. I thought it filled a need and many

readers like the magazine. Also, I wanted to provide a little perspective from an Apple II user's (and maybe a little Atari 5200) perspective.

It hasn't been easy some months. I've submitted articles the day before or even a few days after Scott has asked for them (Sorry Scott.....hahahahah). Yet, it has been rewarding to contribute to the continuing legacy that is Retrogaming Times Monthly.

Thanks to Tom Zjaba who created the magazine originally and all the various people who have contributed to the magazine over the years.

Happy 10th Anniversary to Retrogaming Times Monthly/Retrogaming Times. I look forward to seeing many more issues!

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We continue to review titles released in 1982, for their 25th anniversary. This month we have the Many Faces of AstroChase which came out on home systems and later made it to the arcade as an Atari 600XL in disguise. "There is no escape" is the byline, but most memorable is the on-screen "eye candy" that probably made this a multi-award winning title in 1982. The action takes place in what looks like (at first glance of a screenshot) a high resolution, multi-object, multi-colored playfield of stars and planets, and a prominent view of the Earth. Before we get to the action, the drama unfolds with a high resolution, animated introduction screen where our hero walks out to the launch area, gets lifted upwards into his (hovering?) space fighter, which then fires its thrusters and heads out into space. Your job is to protect and save the Earth from 16 enemy mega-mines which slowly work their way towards the Earth. One hit is all that is needed to eliminate each mine, but one mine reaching the Earth is all that is needed to end civilization as we know it. Unless you complete the 34th and final Chase (round), every game will end with the Earth destroyed in spectacular fashion. Even if you lose all ships, the gameplay ends but the action is fast-forwarded so that the mines then hit the Earth and you still see the explosion. Quite depressing. Indeed, "There is no escape".

Once started, your trusty space vehicle is always on the move, maneuvering in all 8 directions between the planets and stars. If it hits anything neutral, it will bounce back in the opposite direction. Some celestial bodies are packed in very close proximity, but the layout or maze is pretty much different every Chase and every time you play. While you hunt down the enemy mines, the enemy's fighters are moving directly towards you to ram or shoot you down. This makes for a unique (at that time) and bizarre merge of "shooter" and "maze" games. A nice (probably unique at that time) feature termed the "Single Thrust Propulsion" allows your vehicle to move in any one direction while simultaneously firing shots in any direction - all with one stick. Once moving in a given direction, press and hold the fire button and move the stick to fire in any of the 8 directions you move the stick. Release the fire button to resume maneuvering the ship. Thus with 1 stick, you can get some of the same type of moving and firing action as in Robotron. A first time player not knowing all these gameplay elements will likely be frustrated and not give this game much credit. This could explain why there are such varied reviews of this game. Hopefully, by reading this review, you too will give it a second chance and get a lot more enjoyment out of it.

Fernando Herrera wrote this game for the Atari 800 for his newly founded company, First Star Software. The company was so named because Fernando was the very first winner of the Atari Program Exchange competition - called the Atari Star Award. His winning entry was "My First Alphabet". Early successes of First Star's disk & cassettes (& some cart) sales on the Atari and C64, prompted Parker Brothers to snatch up the AstroChase cartridge rights for the Atari 800, 2600, 5200, Colecovision, TI-99 and maybe more - with a royalty advance of \$250,000. It is possible ([www.firststarsoftware.com](http://www.firststarsoftware.com) boasts the claim) that this title established a [home system] industry trend with its fully animated, cartoon-like intermissions. See that website for a lot more of the history and awards won by this game and subsequent games like AstroChase 3D

First home version: Atari 800 in 1982 (will not play on XE or XL)

Atari 800 - 1982 by Fernando Herrera - on disk, cassette & very rare on cart by First Star

Atari 800 - 1982 re-released by Parker Brothers cart - not rare

Commodore 64 - 1982 by Michael F.C. Crick & Dennis Kirsch for First Star

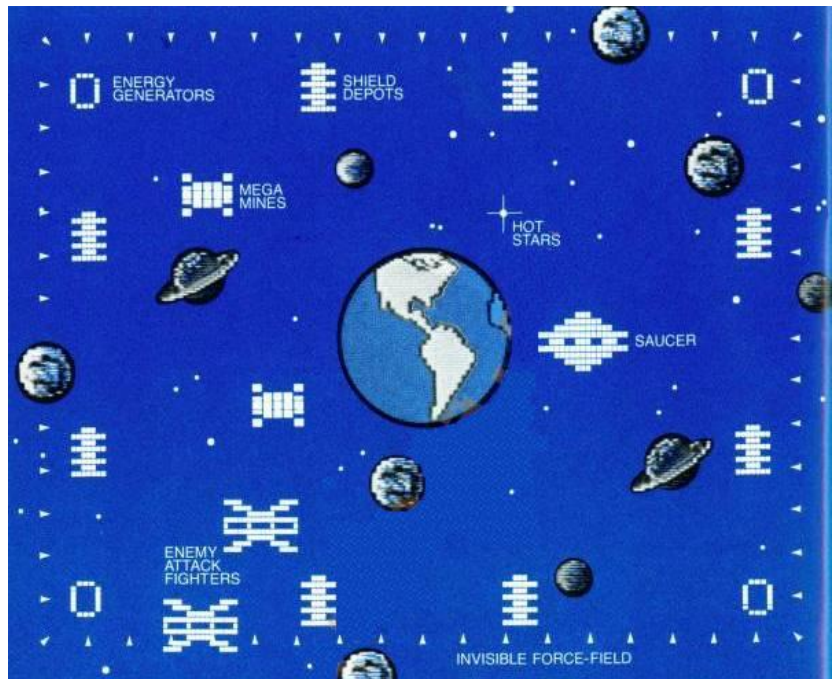
Atari 5200 - 1983 Parker Brothers by unknown (appears to be a port of most of the 800 code)

Rumor Mill: all from Parker Brothers  
2600 cart by Parker Brothers 1982  
completed prototype, by unknown,  
unreleased due to the collapsing market.  
Unknown if/when ROM is available.  
Colecovision & TI-99 only in planning  
stages.

Arcade: 1984 by Exidy - the Max-a-Flex  
cabinet (basically an arcade machine with  
a 600XL inside) along with "Boulder Dash",  
"Bristles" and "Flip & Flop". The arcade  
game makes a significant appearance in  
the 1984 film "The Brother from Another  
Planet." see [www.imdb.com/Title?0087004](http://www.imdb.com/Title?0087004)

To see more screenshots, visit Moby  
Games at:

<http://www.mobygames.com/game/astro-chase/screenshots>



AstroChase manual artwork courtesy of Atarimania.

Home Version Similarities - except those in < > all home versions have: a title screen with a slow, animated intro which cannot be skipped, but fortunately subsequent games begin without viewing it; you can accidentally hit the wrong key and be forced to watch it all over again; there is no demo or attract mode, but if you wait long enough, one of the (advertised) 8? intermissions will preview; these intermissions also show up after completing so many (5?) Chases, and have animation and text displays such as "Where is everybody?"; you have a choice of starting each game at Chase (round) 1 through 24; default is to begin at Chase #1 (or #8 on original); complete each Chase by eliminating all 16 <5200 (8)> enemy mines thus moving to the next higher (more difficult) one; you are congratulated via text message after each Chase "You saved the Earth" and are given 2 more ships; before the next Chase begins, and any time you lose a ship, there's an indefinite pause provided; Chase #25 to #34 are only reachable by playing each one consecutively; each Chase you begin near Mother Earth, since you must protect her from the Magardians mine's - if any one of them hits the Earth, it will cause our planet to explode; any time that you lose a ship, the immediate area is cleared of enemy ships and you begin in that exact location with a reserve ship; each mine need only be hit once by your weapons fire to be eliminated; only a few mines begin inside our galaxy, while most are outside the galaxy and may not even be seen at the start of a Chase; the mines always move towards the Earth while the unlimited supply of Megardian fighters always move towards your ship; there is a limit of 3 enemy fighters and 3 of their weapons on-screen at any time, but they are replenished more frequently as the rounds increase; each Chase only has one type of enemy ship attacking, with just a difference in their color; there are 8 enemy types, each more deadly and worth more points than the previous; the enemies become more skillful by adding the ability to penetrate celestial obstacles, the ability to fire back at you, and finally, increased speed; the enemy fighters cannot harm the Earth, just you; any contact with the fighters or their weapons eliminates your ship; fortunately your ship has unlimited firepower, but only two shots can be fired at a time until they hit something or clear the screen; your weapon will eliminate any enemy or mine they contact but do no harm the Earth or the celestial bodies; the celestial bodies remain fixed each Chase, but their arrangement is random and varies from game to game and from Chase to Chase; as you navigate the maze everything scrolls along to match, revealing about 10% of the galaxy on-screen; the galaxy is laid out like a 3 by 3 square & bounded by an invisible force field which keeps you within it; contact with the force field also drains your energy and you bounce back; your shots, however, will penetrate the boundary, so you can shoot at the enemies and mines when outside the galaxy/boundary; lying just inside the force field are items that mark the 2-D galaxy's edges; each of the 4 corners have 1 Energy Generator; move back and forth over the generator to gain an infinite amount of energy; there are 8 Shield Depots, 2

per side, positioned along each of the galaxy's 4 edges; running over a depot eats up 100 energy units, but gains you invulnerability (shields) for up to 10 seconds; when shielded (ship turns yellow or flashes colors), you cannot acquire more energy, but you can still fire, or ram enemy fighters for points; you cannot ram (to destroy) the mines when shielded or otherwise; you lose 1 energy point every second of action and for every shot fired; if you bump into any celestial object you bounce back from it, but also drain a bit of your energy with each collision; drop below 300 units of energy and hear a low energy warning; upon reaching 0 units your ship explodes; each new ship (3 to begin each game) has 1000 units of energy; all remaining units of energy are counted as bonus points at the end of each round, and you begin that next Chase with that quantity; the enemy weapons fire seems to cut out from the audio channels when you are firing or bouncing (this happens to some extent on all versions); the "1812 Overture" plays endlessly, looping after about 1 minute; the music can be toggled off/on; the music kicks up a notch (in volume) when you witness the Earth exploding; there are sound effects or a jingle heard when: you fire, the enemy fires, you are hit, the enemy is hit, you bounce, you use the shield, you collect energy; are low on energy and more.

### **Bronze Medal: 5200 (39)**

My first reaction was the controls are close but no cigar. Most of the time the Masterplay Interface works flawlessly, just like the 800 . . . and then goes kaput (lose all steering) and stays that way until one powers off. Using the Wico sticks seems to work the best otherwise, but seems to be too slow to activate a change in directions firing or moving - possibly caused by the analog nature of the controls. And then there's the usual analog drift in the controls after playing for a while you can accidentally bump it or the center position moves on its own. I scored Control an (8), which breaks an otherwise 3 way tie. If for some reason my Masterplay Interface is faulty, then Controls score a 10 and a share of the gold. Use the <#> to increase the Chase number. Abort with the <\*>.



Atari 5200 screenshot courtesy of AtariAge.

Is the 5200 a direct port of the code? I did not scrutinize the sound effects, nor look at a lot of screenshots, so other than the minor differences in displays, text and credits, the 5200 appears to be a port of the 800 code. The Gameplay is complete (8) with quite a lot going on, but I don't think one can appreciate (score) the playability and strategy any higher. I'm sure many of you would lower it - i.e. there is a lot coded in, but does it really add to the gameplay? The 5200 does lose a little bit compared to the other medal winners, as the limit of only 8 mines to eliminate easily cuts the Chase time in half. Addictiveness is OK (6) and the same comments apply to all home versions reviewed here. The pause using the <Pause> and the earlier noted breaks in the action when completing a round or losing a ship are great. The challenge does gradually build up in the first 8 Chases, but I do not see more than a handful of player ever completing Chases #24 or above. The thrill of continuing on, or trying all starting rounds to see what is new or different is gone pretty quickly. You'll be hard pressed to see many of the intermissions, other than if they do all randomly play in the attract (doing nothing) mode. I think it would be a lot more fun if the first 24 rounds were not quite so hard, but hard enough that enough players could make it to see a celebration screen. Then start the rounds over again, but increase the speed and difficulty more the second round. As it is, you play until you cannot get past a certain level and that may be all you care to play. No fun exploring, trying. Graphics are outstanding (9), but most of this is earned via the scrolling of such a complex and detailed playfield. Besides the scrolling, there is not that much on-screen action, more so reaction to the 3 enemies and their 3 weapons coming at you every 5 seconds. There is a 5200 (only) screen glitch near the right edge - a line of ?pretzels? from top to bottom - tried different systems, different and no controllers and multi-cart but it is always present. I gave it no penalty as it does not block the view too much, but is annoying. I've seen this or similar effect on a handful of 5200 games. One Atari 8 bit & 5200

intermission shows people lined up waving as you land and then take off again. One of these (repeated) characters looks like Herrera's clown from the "My First Alphabet" game. Sound is sharp (8) with a nice (toggle-able) musical score, a few jingles and a good variety of useful effects. Toggle music via <0>. Cart is not too rare, and really cool looking. With only 2 carts and no original manuals in my collection - I did not include a Many Faces collage .sigh.

### Gold Medal: C64 & Atari 8 bit (41)

#### **Commodore 64:**

My first reaction is that I cannot confirm if there are 34 Chases here, but we'll assume there are and the scoring would not vary much anyhow. Gameplay is complete (8), with everything as expected. Addictiveness is OK (6) with the pause <Space bar>. Graphics are wonderful (9) and Sound is pleasant (8). Controls are perfect (10). Unknown how rare the C64 diskette or cassettes are, or even bootleg copies, but there is always emulation.



C64 screenshots of an intermission and on-screen action - courtesy of Lemon 64.

#### **Atari 8 bit computer:**

My first reaction was the home version can only be played on a 400 or 800, not the XE or XL series. I only played the 8 bit Parker Bros Cart, but it appears (from the manual and screenshots) that the only difference is the default starting place at Chase 1 or 8. Controls are (10) perfect. The 8 bit cart, disk and cassette are all available, but a bit hard to find from First Star, cart by PB is a lot easier to come by. <Option> aborts. <Start> starts the action. <Space Bar> pauses the action. <Select> increases the Chase number.



All the Atari scores match the C64 above. Graphically all 3 medal winners have smooth scrolling, nice color variety, graphical variety, details, colorful backgrounds, many little background stars, good displays, and the awesome explosion. There are no moving objects with any multi-color or animations (only those seen during the intro/intermissions). There are some minor differences that can be pointed out, but cumulatively,



none of these amounts to more than a half a point. I have lumped the comments to be the C64 or Atari (both the 800 & 5200). For sound, the C64 is a bit better. The Low energy effect is poor on the Atari but much more alarming on the C64. The Atari bouncing and recharge energy sounds are muffled, whereas the C64 is more exciting. C64 enemy shots are muffled - Atari more energetic. Shield music more lively on the C64. For Graphics the Atari is a bit better. There seem to be a little bit more details, maybe more scrolling objects and better color choices and variety. Overall this is a tossup.



Atari 800 screenshots of the introduction and on-screen action - courtesy of Atarimania

#### Acknowledgements, Updates and Errata since last month.

Errata from last month's review of Xevious - Alert readers (Colin, Rob, Matthew & Ken) all point out that the 7800 Xevious does have a way to toggle the joystick fire button controls. I have not been nearly as thorough as I used to (lacking time) and since the 7800 manual did not say there was a setting to switch, I did not check the difficulty switches. Sure enough you can set the fire buttons to control the weapons individually (like the arcade) or combined. The scores will stay the same, as I did not penalize the others much for having only the 1 fire button. Many thanks guys and keep coming back for more. Your help, opinions and any secrets that I do not reveal are appreciated and we'll post them here.

Errata from RTM#37 - Pooyan. The CoCo screenshots on Mobygames may have their colors reversed as reported to me directly from one of the game's programmers, Gerry Humphrey. There should be pink trees & blue sky. But then CoCo expert Curtis Boyle tells me that his screenshots provided to MobyGames are correct as viewed on a CoCo3. The truth is out there - maybe they are reversed somehow when played, as programmed on the CoCo 1. Regardless, Gerry apologizes for the Wolves looking like Cats, and says that he looks forward to doing an interview with me for the RTM.

Come back next month for another 1982 review. Don't be disappointed if I only cover an Apple ][ lost face. Contact Alan at: [Hewston95@NOSPAMstratos.net](mailto:Hewston95@NOSPAMstratos.net) or visit the Many Faces of site: <http://my.stratos.net/~hewston95/RT/ManyFacesHome.htm>



### ***Gaming in the Magic Kingdom***

***by Tom Zjaba***

If you are a parent, the odds are your kids will want to go to Walt Disney World. It is a magnet for kids, like E3 is for gamers. While the thought of spending thousands of dollars is

enough to send a shiver down your spine, the thought of no gaming for a week is equally scary. Sure, you can bring a Gameboy or PSP to tide you over, but will it be enough? If you are reading this newsletter, odds are you are a die hard game fan and a week without games is cruel and unusual punishment. And you thought multiple ride on "It's a Small World" was scary. But fear not because there is gaming at the Magic Kingdom. In fact, almost every park has a good selection of video games to get you through your vacation and help you forget how much you just paid for lunch. So here is a list of some of the great gaming at the Magic Kingdom.



Tom Zjaba and family at Hallow Weekends at Cedar Point Amusement Park

**Magic Kingdom** - The main park at Walt Disney World is home of all the famous rides. From Pirates of the Caribbean to the Haunted Mansion to Dumbo, it has the most rides. It also has the most guests as the park is almost always full. Be prepared to wait in lines for every ride, every meal and to get in and out of the park. But as the day gets hot and you need a break, hop over to the arcade that is right under Space Mountain. Not only is it a large arcade with a good selection of games, it is air conditioned. And there is no lines! There is a good mix of new and classic games, with most of the classic games being the remakes (the Ms. Pac-Man and Galaga 20th anniversary edition being one). And of course there is the selection of redemption games to suck quarters out of the kids faster than a Hoover. But one of the best features is a nice selection of pinball games. There is a good ten pinball machines to choose from including Roller Coaster Tycoon, Simpsons, Star Wars and more. A great way to cool off and get your gaming fix.

**Epcot** - The one park that was made for adults as much as kids, Epcot really does offer something for everyone. With the World Showcase you can get a taste of eleven different countries. From the architecture, the dress and the food, Disney does a great job of recreating such places as China, Germany and Mexico. While there are not alot of rides in Epcot, there are some great ones. Soarin' and Test Track are both great rides. And the Living Seas is an awesome aquarium! But if you want to do some gaming and your wallet is getting thin, this is the park for you! Head over to Innovations where they always have a selection of consoles set up with games to play for free! Expect family friendly games and some based on Disney Properties (think Haunted Mansion game) but the games are free and how often do you hear that at Disney? There are also some simulation type games based on the Mission Space ride at the Mission Space that you can play for free as well. Some are pretty good but most are decent at best. But for free, they are not bad.

**MGM Studios** - Some of the best rides reside in MGM Studios. If you like the faster, scarier rides then this is the park for you! Aerosmith Rock n Roller Coaster and Twilight Zone Tower of Terror are the most thrilling rides in all of Disney World. Star Tours is fun too! The shows are quite good as well, especially the new Lights, Motors, Action! Extreme Stunt Show. You will see some amazing driving stunts and learn a few things about Hollywood tricks. But for gaming, there is one destination in MGM, Toy Story Pizza Planet! I do not recommend eating there as the food was mediocre at best (the pizza will make you long for school cafeteria pizza and that is not a good thing) . But the arcade is great! A wide selection of arcade and redemption games awaits you! They even have The Claw from the movie if you want to try and win a stuffed toy. The place is themed very nicely as well. But the waits at the redemption desk can be long, so keep that in mind as your kids want to play the



redemption games. If you want a good meal and great atmosphere, you are better off going to the Sci-Fi Drive-In Diner. There you can sit in booths that look like cars and watch a drive-in screen that shows trailers of 50's monster movies, cartoons and vintage intermission commercials. The food is delicious and not too expensive.

**Animal Kingdom** - There is a few great rides at Animal Kingdom including Expedition Everest and Dinosaur as well as some incredible shows like The Lion King. There is a ton of animals to see and there is the Rainforest Cafe for a good meal with great theming. But if you are a video game fan, you are out of luck. Did not see any arcades at Animal Kingdom. But the park does close early (usually around 5:00 PM) so you have time to get some gaming in at the hotel.

**Disney Quest** - If you are a video game fanatic, this place is a must visit attraction. Located in Downtown Disney, this three story arcade is as close to nirvana as a game fanatic can get in Orlando. It cost \$30.00 to get in, but it is worth it. What you have is five levels of video games, all set on free play! And they have them sectioned off by themes. Want racing games? They have a section full of racing games from Mario Kart Arcade Edition to Crazy Taxi. Want sports games? They have section with Sega Bass Fishing, NBA Jam and Madden Football. Want classic arcade games? They have tons including Pac-Man, Space Invaders, Tron, Moon Patrol, Joust, Galaga, Jungle Hunt, Donkey Kong and more. Most of the popular arcade games are there. But be warned that not all are working properly. You will find some with broken joysticks or buttons. But with the amount of abuse they get, it is to be expected. There is also a large selection of light gun games and a small selection of pinball tables. And they even have a whole wall of Jambo! Safari. Besides video games, they also have a nice selection of rides including a cool Pirates of the Caribbean simulator ride/game. Other must see are Cyber Space Mountain where you design a roller coaster and then get to ride it! Ride the Comix is also alot of fun as it is more of a virtual reality game than a ride. There is enough to do here to keep you busy all day. And there is enough for the kids to do as well. The only games that do cost money is the redemption games. Sure \$30.00 sounds steep, but with all the games you can play, it is not hard to get your money's worth. Think of it as a video game buffet.

So when you finally make the trip to Disney World, keep this list and know that there is gaming at almost all the Disney parks. And add a trip to Disney Quest to the list and you will have a vacation that is as memorable for you as it was for the kids.

- Tom Zjaba (After three straight years of going to WDW, finally went elsewhere with a trip to Williamsburg. And to keep from withdrawal, we stayed at a condo that offered free play at their two arcades.)



## ***Taking The Pole Position***

*by [David Lundin, Jr.](#)*

Ever since I first dropped a quarter in one, I've always wanted an arcade cabinet. Then again I think that's a common statement among those of us that were able to spend time during the glorious golden age of the arcade. Even though I only caught the tail end of that era, growing up in California's Silicon Valley gave me an avenue to stay on the cutting edge of coin-op gaming. I spent my summers at the large arcades, weekends at Bullwinkle's (imagine Chuck E. Cheese except much broader age appeal), and of course countless nights at those small out of the way arcade dives that I miss very dearly. Although the older days of arcades were beginning to fizz out, I was still able to find refuge in special classic areas of large family arcades, as well as the smaller single location operations that had been tucked away in the corners of strip malls for years. Eventually those too would fade away and my classic coin-op fix would be relegated to occasionally seeing a machine in passing and the increasingly more seldom trips to the Santa Cruz boardwalk's classic games area. It seemed now, more than ever, I wanted a home arcade or at least a few games so that I could peer back in to a

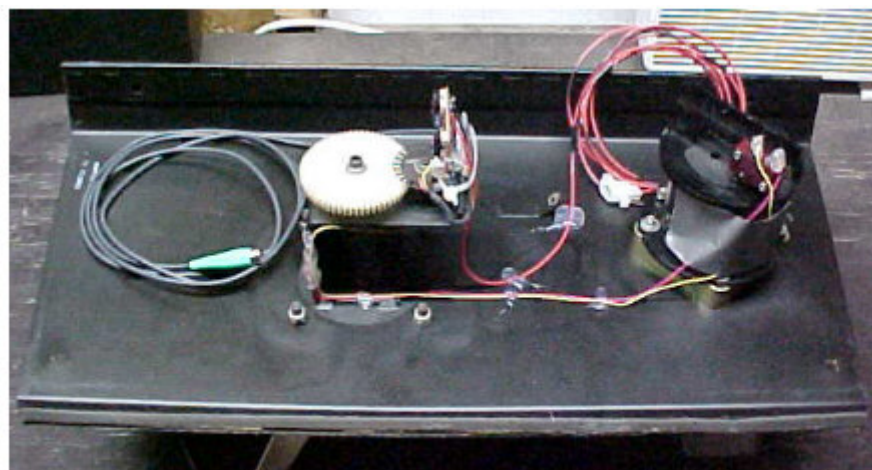
fraction of that long lost nostalgia. For our 10 Year Anniversary issue I thought I'd do something a little special in place of the NES'cade column and instead bring you, our readers, a look at my recently restored and converted arcade cabinet.

I think many of us retrogamers, in the back of our heads, have a list of the arcade games they'd like to own if given the chance. Money, space, rarity, all those things aside I think we all have an idea of games we'd simply love to have in our homes. While browsing Craigslist on a whim one night I stumbled upon a vague listing for a \$100 Pole Position upright local to me. I don't know exactly where Pole Position fits on that arcade list in my head but it has always been in the top ten, so I sent an e-mail to the seller and called it a night. It turned out that the seller was quite local to me, four blocks away in fact. I was heading out for the San Jose Grand Prix that night so I quickly arranged to come take a look at the cabinet that morning. Once arriving, an earlier suspicion was confirmed as the seller was another retrogamer that I run into at the local flea market every now and then. Story was the machine was bought in non-working condition with the intent to repair it, however once seeing what's actually inside one of these cabinets he realized he was in over his head and wanted it gone. I poked around inside, gave it a good look over and offered \$50 given the state of the internals. This was agreed upon and I left with my first arcade cabinet - it was my problem now.

Pole Position machines are notorious for being unstable, the boards have a history of frying themselves and that was the case with my cabinet as well. A list was made of what was good, what was bad, and what was salvageable. At the end of this exercise the cosmetic stuff was all good, the electronics were pretty much all bad, and the salvageable list was dissolved into the other two. The game boards were shot and the audio regulator boards didn't look healthy either. The wiring loom, molex connectors, and edge connectors would all need to be replaced as well as the game PCB cage which had a healthy coating of rust on one end. The power supply was a mess and had been bypassed in multiple locations - requiring either replacement or at the very least a complete rebuild. The monitor also appeared to require a heavy rebuild as even though it did turn on, the overall condition was very poor and it had some extreme burn-in. The cabinet itself, control panel, accelerator pedal, and coin doors and mechs were all very nice and functional however. As for the marquee and the glass bezel, they were beautiful and perfect. That's when the decision came to convert this dead however quite salvageable arcade cabinet into a MAME machine. MAME is a computer program that emulates the hardware environment of thousands of different arcade games in conjunction with copies of the original program code that ran on them. In other words, it allows near perfect reproduction of arcade hardware via software that can run on a multitude of devices, namely personal computers. A computer would be used to replace the inner workings of the machine, replacing the original problematic hardware with modern, easy to repair computer components.



Everything inside was stripped out, looked over, and then thrown out if useless to me or anyone else. All screws, nuts and bolts were packaged away in plastic bags, labeled with where they were taken from. I progressed in small steps with the project, moving forward as each possible hurdle was passed, the largest one being the control panel. I took the board out of an old PS/2 mouse, setting it up so that the horizontal optic would interface with the steering wheel optical wheel. In other words the steering wheel would move the mouse back and forth horizontally, something that is easily configured in MAME. To minimize over all cost and complexity I decided to use the mouse board as the interface for all controls. The Pole Position shifter is a single switch, the original Pole Position program code defaults to the car always being in low gear unless the button is held down, when that happens the car is in high gear. The switch for the shifter was wired to the contact points for mouse button 01. The original Pole Position accelerator pedal is analog, controlled with a potentiometer, something that a digital mouse button won't work with. I disconnected the analog connections in the pedal but left all the parts there in case I wanted to go back and return it to analog at another time. I affixed a standard arcade microswitch with an extension bar to the underside of the pedal assembly, at about 75% pedal press the microswitch is depressed. This was then connected to the contact points for mouse button 02, with a molex connector in between so that either the pedal or control panel can be serviced independently outside of the machine. The coin switches were connected to a simple keyboard hack which involves tracing connecting points of a keyboard key to their integrated circuit connections inside the keyboard.



Reworked control panel with mouse board replacing original optic, shifter wired to mouse button 01 and long lead with molex connector for pedal wired to mouse button 02.



As for the computer itself, it was all built out of extra components I had lying around collecting dust. The display was replaced with an old CRT computer monitor with the swivel base removed and the screen bezel painted black. I assembled the entire computer on a sheet of fiberboard that would be installed in the cabinet as a new shelf. The system itself is a Pentium II at 350MHz with 128MB of RAM. An old floppy, CD drive, and small hard disk along with an extra video card rounded out the internals. All my computer operations were set up and configured outside of the cabinet, including basic setup with the Pole Position controls. An inexpensive pair of computer speakers were disassembled and installed inside the cabinet in the same location as the original speakers. A couple small pushbutton switches are used for computer power and reset, mounted within easy reach through the coin door. Everything is connected to a power bar which is mounted inside the cabinet near the coin door, the power bar then runs to a heavy duty extension cord that mirrors the original power cord route through the back. A small fluorescent shop utility light is used to light the marquee, wired to plug into the power bar with everything else. The machine was then scrubbed down completely, removing years of use and abuse. Along the bottom the side art was shredded and peeling badly so I made a level slice just above the peeling area to prevent it from continuing. The top and back panels needed to be completely sanded and repainted as they had some water damage. The inside was sanded and scrubbed down, and the outside was scrubbed one more time for good measure.

Once the cabinet was cleaned the monitor was fitted and secured, then the cleaned and repainted accelerator pedal was installed along with the coin door. The speakers and marquee lighting were set in place and their wiring run. This was followed by the control panel and the computer shelf. Careful cord management was paramount from the beginning, keeping everything out of the way of everything else. I sealed up the back, plugged the cord in, reached into the coin door, and flipped the main power switch... The marquee sprang to life and the sounds of the monitor powering up could be heard. I reached in and pressed the computer power button... I was greeted by the MAME startup screen, a replacement for the Windows 98 boot screen, and then dumped into DOS. My game operations are controlled via batch files and an on screen menu in DOS. Simply reach inside, type in the number corresponding to the game you want to play and it loads. This allows the machine to appear completely stock from the outside - no additional MAME buttons or special controls - yet allows more games to be played. It's basically like doing a board swap except it's faster since it's done in software and through the coin door. So for the average person, the machine appears as a 100% original Pole Position upright. After a little fine tuning of the controls the only thing left to do was to replace the shroud around the monitor, of which a replacement was made from poster board.



The cabinet is set up to play games that use a single pedal and two gear shifter: American Speedway, Badlands, Championship Sprint, Danny Sullivan's Indy Heat, Ironman Ivan Stewart's Super Off-Road, Ironman Ivan Stewart's Super Off-Road Track Pak, Konami GT, Pole Position (all versions), Pole Position II (all versions), Stocker, Super Sprint, and Turbo. Championship Sprint is one of my all time favorite games so being able to play it as well is a big bonus. The Sprint games originally had a start button, this is remapped to the accelerator pedal. The selection / nitro button in Indy Heat and Super Off-Road is mapped to the shifter, same with the fire button in Badlands. Being an emulation glutton, Turbo runs slow but all other games perform perfectly to their original counterparts. I should note that

MAME required a recompile to emulate proper shifting in Pole Position, I'm using DOS MAME v0.56. Although it plays a lot more, the machine was purchased as a Pole Position cabinet and most of the time that's what is being played on it. Since it features both Pole Position games as well as the Japanese and bootleg versions, I've christened the cabinet Pole Position Deluxe. Even now, over two weeks after the project was completed, I can be found spending at least a few hours every night turning laps around Fuji Speedway.

So far things have been running smoothly with the machine, only minor adjustments have been required. It's been a big hit with everyone that's played it and it's nice to see that the across the board appeal of these classic games is still alive and well. Currently the cabinet is living outside, waiting for space to be made indoors which should be taken care of in a few weeks. It's almost surreal to stand outside in the night air, drop in a quarter and prepare to qualify, it truly does bring back the fondest of memories. Total cost of the entire project, including the original cost of the cabinet, was under \$150. Twenty of that was made back by selling the non-working game boards for parts on eBay. If there's one bad thing about this project it's that now I want even more games, when I don't even really have space for this one. Oh well, I'll make room, a Frogger cocktail table serving double duty as a desk perhaps?

NES'cade will be back next month with a continuing look at arcade classics that don't require two people and a truck to move. I do want to take a moment to say that it has been and continues to be an absolute privilege to contribute to Retrogaming Times Monthly. Here's to another ten years!

"InsaneDavid" also runs a slowly growing gaming site at <http://www.classicplastic.net/dvgi>



## ***Retrogaming: Blast From The Past & A Vision of the Future***

***by Donald Lee***

As I was thinking about to write for the 10th Anniversary of Retrogaming Times Monthly/Retrogaming Times, I came across an interesting thought. Is Retrogaming simply a form of Nostalgia or is there something more? I think I came up with an interesting answer.

The hobby of Retrogaming is usually thought of as nostalgia for many of us who grew up during the 80's. Whether you were a fan of Pac Man, the Atari 2600, or the various other games/systems from those days, you can now easily play just about any of these games today on modern hardware. For a old time gamer like me, that is one of the benefits of growing up in the 80's. I can enjoy the nostalgia of the older generation of games while still enjoying the newer generation of games. Many kids of today might look at Pac Man (or the Atari 2600) and think "What's the big deal?"

Indeed, I think there is more to "Retrogaming" than mere nostalgia for old timers. The old games or systems that we think of as "Retro" today were "Visions of the Future" when they were released.

For example, many gamers today enjoy the "Madden" football series from EA Sports. How many of those game players know that the "Madden" series originated from "John Madden Football" that was originally released on the Apple II series of computers?

John Madden Football is primitive compared to the Madden games released on the Xbox 360 or Playstation 3. But considering that John Madden Football was written for a computer with limited graphics/sound capability and only 64K of RAM, you will be impressed at what the game was able to accomplish. The developers of the game had a vision and did as well as they could at the time.

However, just as George Lucas took advantage of the new technology that exists today to do editing of the original "Star Wars" trilogy, developers today took the original John Madden Football and re-made into the game that is today.

The same could be said of any of the games that exist in the market today. One of the better examples would be the now defunct Ultima series. Ultima is one of the series where you can see the lineage of the older generation to the newer generation of games. The earlier Ultima's (I-V) had simplistic graphics and sound due to the limits of the technology that existed at the time. Creator Richard Garriot probably had grand visions of what he wanted to do but given the limitations he faced, he and his developer team did the best they could. As the years progressed and the technology improved, the later releases of Ultima evolved with drastically improved graphics and sound. The advanced techlogy allowed the developers to get closer to what their vision was with the original Ultima's.

So as we look as today's systems and games, don't look at simply what they offer today. Look at the possibilites that exist for the future. In another 20 years or so, future "Retrogamers" will look back fondly on the Xbox 360, Playstation 3 and Nintendo Wii as we have with the Atari 2600, Apple II or other systems.



## ***Nintendo Amusement Park***

***by Tom Zjaba***

I am still surprised that there has not been an amusement park based on the Nintendo characters. If there ever was a large collection of material to work with that is universally known to both kids and adults, it is the Nintendo characters. Find someone who has never heard of Mario. That is like finding someone who has never heard of Ronald McDonald or Santa Claus. He is that big. Throw in other known characters like Donkey Kong, Luigi, Link, Pikachu and others and you have the makings of a great amusement park.

I know what you are thinking, it would cost a ton of money to make a Nintendo Amusement Park. Land cost alot of money as does rides. And where could you put it that it would attract people? I have an answer to that. There is an amusement park in Ohio that has a ton of land, not far from a major attraction and is in need of something to save it. That park is Geauga Lake. The park sits on 690 acres of land, which is immense in size. It also has a ton of rides already there that can be easily converted to Nintendo rides with some theming. And most importantly, it is only an hour away from Cedar Point, one of the premier amusement parks in the world. Cedar Point alone brings in 3 million guests a year and could easily send some of them to the Nintendo Amusement Park.

You may be asking, why don't they do this in Japan? I always wondered that as well. It sounds like a sure fire hit. But with the cost of land in Japan, it probably would be too expensive to do it. And there are already some great amusement parks in Japan. But here is a chance to take a park with the room, the rides and create a park that complements Cedar Point instead of compete with it. And Cedar Point and Geauga Lake are both owned by the same company, Cedar Fairs.

I know you think it would cost a ton of money to convert the park from Geauga Lake to the Nintendo Amusement Park. Not really as most of it would be painting rides, adding new signs and some theming. It would cost less than a hyper coaster. But the return on the investment would be great. Right now, few people outside of the area know of Geauga Lake. But add the Nintendo name and you would bring in alot more visitors, especially if you did a package deal with Cedar Point.

Another question you may have is why would Nintendo want to do this. First off, they would get money for allowing the use of their characters. Second, it gives them another presence in the very lucrative US market. Third, it is a great way to brand Nintendo as more than video games. It puts



them in the same league with Disney and they could use this as a way to spring board into other areas like full feature films, cable channel and other avenues. And they could sell a ton of licensed Nintendo merchandise like t-shirts, dvds, toys, trading cards and more. They could also use it to promote their latest video games.

So with that taken care of, here is some of my suggestions for rides to be rethemed. I also have some plans for new rides that would give the park some unique experiences not found either at Geauga Lake or Cedar Point.

### Rethemed Rides

**Link's Boomerang Coaster** - It is now known as Head Spin and is one of the many Vekoma Boomerang coasters in the country. But with green track, cars with logos of Link from Legend of Zelda and a new sign and you have a whole new ride.

**Star Fox Flight Academy** - It is now known as Thunderhawk and is an Vekoma SLC Inverted Coaster. But with Star Fox on it and a new black track and some theming that gives it a space look, you could have a better ride. The theming could be simple stuff like some meteors and ships that would be placed around the track. Also, make the loading deck look more space like with some cool lighting and some monitors with Star Fox and his friends.

**Wario's Wild Wide** - Now known as the Villain, it could be rethemed to highlight one of Nintendo's greatest villains. It is a great wooden coaster that would need little theming.

**Super Smash Bros Bumper Cars** - It is now the Dodgem ride but with cool stickers of Nintendo's most known characters, it goes from a simple Dodgem to being a Super Smash Time! Each car would have a different character including Mario, Luigi, Princess Peach, Donkey Kong, Link, Zelda, Pikachu, Wario, Bowser and others.

**Mario's Merry Oldies** - Join Mario as you ride through the mushroom kingdom on these classic cars. Was the Merry Oldies Cars ride. Just a repaint of the cars and some theming to make it look like the Mushroom Kingdom (pipes, mushrooms, koopas, etc...) and you have a fun new ride.

**Donkey Kong Country Rapids** - It is now the Grizzly Run, which has been turned into a dull ride. Speed it back up, add in the falls and water spray they used to have and add some jungle theming (palm trees, vines and other foilage) as well as a big Donkey Kong and you have a fun ride that is now a waste of time.

**Yoshi Express** - It once was the Roadrunner Express before the changed to name to one of the worst names for a roller coaster, Beaverland Express. It is a kiddie coaster that features a train. A quick paint job and a Yoshi sign is all you need.

**Pokemon Village** - What is now Kidworks Playzone would be rethemed to have Pokemon named rides. With popular characters like Pikachu, Squirtle and Jigglypuff, there is no shortage of ideas. This would also be the place to meet and greet the Nintendo characters.

**Metroid Space Flight** - It is now Dominator, the best coaster in the park. It already is futuristically themed (was once the Batman Night Flight), so it would take a little theming to get it right.

There are other rides, but I only did a handful right now. Next is my idea for some new additions to make the park truly unique to the area. This would make it a true family place to be and also give it a couple good dark rides.

**Animal Crossing Town** - If you enter Geauga Lake through the main gates, you will see a big chunk of unused land on the left side. It once had a large playground. I think it should be turned into a

playground again. This time we theme it to the Animal Crossing game with small houses for kids to explore and statues of some of the animals that make up the game. Also there would a very large climbing play area for kids to climb, explore and slide through. Low cost to build, low cost to maintain and it is already shaded. Add benches for parents to sit in and put a concession stand there and you have a great place to get out of the sun and have fun.

**Luigi's Mansion** - Mario's brother had a game about him going into a haunted mansion. Now we can recreate it for the whole family to enjoy. With state of the art special effects it would be a spooky mansion that is not too scary and something the whole family can enjoy.

**Gotta Catch Em All Pokemon Ride** - Think of a shooting ride like Buzz Lightyear in Disney or Scooby Doo at King's Island. You would have your camera gun and it is your job to catch pics of all the Pokemon. They would pop out all over the place and at the end you would see a list of all the Pokemon you were able to catch. A fun game for the whole family.

Besides rides, there would also be an elaborate arcade with lots of Nintendo games, a Nintendo museum with classic consoles set up to try as well as history of the company, programmers, systems, games and characters. I would also redo the theatre to make it a continous running theatre that showed episodes of Super Mario, Link and others. It would also have classic Nintendo commercials and more. And of course, there would be a ton of Nintendo themed merchandise to buy at the many gift shops.

While it is a good idea and has a ton of potential, it is doubtful that it ever happens. But it is great to dream and who knows, maybe if the idea gets out there, someone will run with it.

Tom Zjaba (The eternal dreamer who is ready to buy five season passes to this park.)



## *Nintendo Realm: Before the Famicom*

*by Scott Jacobi*

In honor of this month's special anniversary issue, I thought it was only fitting to go even more retro than usual. When looking at Nintendo's past prior to the release of the Famicom, you only have a couple of options. They released Hanafuda cards for years, but I know nothing about Hanafuda. They did make a number of successful arcade games before the Famicom, but they've gotten tremendous coverage on these web pages. And let's not forget their pre-Famicom dedicated "Color TV" consoles. I would dearly love to cover them, but I have never been able to get my hands on one. So what am I left with? Why, the Game & Watch series of course.

Allow me to set the stage. Third grade in 1983, Staten Island New York, lunch time. All of the students were herded in to the cafeteria that typically smelled of poorly concocted lunch room kitchen food and heavy doses of ammonia and other cleaning chemicals. Two things were immediately arranged once your spot at the lunch table was chosen: the order in which you were going to eat your lunch (dessert first, sandwich second, fruit last, if at all), and the Game & Watch that you had available for trade with some fellow G&W owner. Sure, you had Donkey Kong Jr., but you could play that any time. Lunch time was for new experiences, and the kid on the opposite side of the table owned Donkey Kong II. The kid two seats down from you had Parachute. And the kid you didn't like to talk to had Mario Bros., so you were willing to make an exception in this case for the sake of the lunch time trade. The poor kid on the end of the table who had some non-Nintendo manufactured LCD game would have a tough time orchestrating a trade with anyone since no one ever heard of Sub Patrol, and for some weird reason, it was solar powered. Even as 7 and 8 year olds, we were pretty snobby about labels. So let's take a look at what was hot in the lunch room at the time.

### **Donkey Kong**

Naturally, if it was hot in the arcades, kids wanted to play it at home, even if it was nothing like the arcade game. Fortunately, Nintendo's multi-screen Donkey Kong game was kind of like the arcade, in that many of the features at least resembled the arcade to some extent. There were barrels to jump over and ladders to climb, and for a kid, that was good enough. Sometimes you didn't even care that you were supposed to be rescuing some girl, who probably had cooties. It was all about making that monkey fall. For a multi-screen game, Donkey Kong packed a lot of action. The goal of the bottom screen was to jump over any barrels that came your way. The problem was, the places where this was possible were limited. Some sections of the two ramps were covered by an overhanging girder that prevented you from jumping. Along the higher ramp, girders were carried along an overhead conveyor belt that must also be avoided. When you safely reached the top screen, you still had a shower of barrels to worry about, since DK did a pretty good job keeping a consistent flow of them raining down on you. You had to flick the switch on the left to activate the crane on the right, and then you must safely reach the ledge before the crane deactivated itself for no reason, and jump when the crane swung your way and yank one of the clamps holding Donkey Kong's platform in place. Once all four clamps were yanked, you were the champ for a few seconds until it all started over at a faster pace.



### **Donkey Kong Jr.**

I can't find the source for this statistic, but I believe this was one of the most popular and common Game & Watches available. Its smaller size made it more affordable than the multi-screens, and its arcade inspired name made it very recognizable. Donkey Kong Jr. packs all of the arcade drama on one tiny screen. But what a screen it was. There were two levels (essentially three if you count the vines below the top branch) that Jr. had to maneuver through, with Snapjaws patrolling the upper and lower branches, and Nitpicker birds flying along the level between them. You could avoid the Snapjaws by jumping over them, or by clinging to the vines overhead, but the latter presents a danger because if you're not careful, a Nitpicker could fly up behind you and kill you. Once you climbed up the double vine on the right side of the screen, you then had to cross back to the left to papa. One fruit hangs just prior to the end of the ledge, and if you were lucky, you could manage a triple kill for a whopping 18 points (3 + 6 + 9) before moving on to the final challenge. Just as in Donkey Kong, a key swung back and forth, and the jump for the key had to be properly timed, or Jr. would fall headlong into the bush below. If Jr. managed to catch and unlock all four sections of papa's cage, bonus points were awarded and the action started over at a faster pace. A rather passive and stoic Mario sat beneath the cage, never grimacing or cheering or changing in any way, other than to ring the bell to signal the alarm that you set for 2:55pm so you could remind the teacher that it was time to go home.



### **Donkey Kong II**

Donkey Kong II is a multi screen game just like Donkey Kong was. I can only imagine they went with the roman two moniker because Jr. was already taken, and they didn't want to confuse the market. Unfortunately, they gave up on that strategy when they released both the Donkey Kong Jr. Tabletop version and Panorama version, but I digress. Donkey Kong II was undoubtedly one of the most successful arcade-to-handheld conversions of it's time. Not only did it manage to capture elements from nearly every single screen in the arcade, it almost managed to recreate the chain level perfectly. In II, Jr. starts out at the bottom of the screen, and must climb to the top. He must first jump and knock a key high into the air, and then traverse a branch



positioned below a power-line, jumping over Snapjaws and trying to avoid the sparks overhead. Then he must cross back over the power-line, now jumping the sparks on that line while avoiding the sparks from yet another line over head. After making it back to the left and climbing up the double vine, the challenge of the top screen began. More Snapjaws marched his way as he jumps again to knock the key that was caught in a branch into one of the four lock positions. Then all he must do is climb up the chain beneath the key and push the key into the lock. But to do it safely, he must avoid the Nitpickers that swoop back and forth among the chains just like that do in the arcade. Once all four keys unlocked all four locks, papa was rescued and bonus points were awarded until the action started all over again. And once again, Mario just stands there watching and waiting to ring the alarm for you.

### **Mario Bros.**

Mario Bros. is unique in a couple of respects. It is one of the few horizontal multi screen games that were ever made, and it is a complete departure from the arcade game. Surprisingly, it's still fun to play despite its radical change in design. In the Game & Watch version, Mario and Luigi have apparently taken jobs in a rather whacky packaging plant for a bottle distributor. Five conveyor belts automate the process of filling a box with bottles and wrapping the box up with a nice near bow so that the box can be shipped off to its destination. There's only one problem:



nothing automates the process of moving each box from one conveyor belt to the next. That's were the brothers come in. The two of them alone must manage to catch each box as they fall off one conveyor belt and propagate them to the next. With one brother on the right, who must also be concerned with new boxes coming off a separate belt on the bottom, and one brother on the left, who tosses the boxes carelessly into a waiting truck, the brothers alone must manage up to eight of these boxes as they slide across the belts. They must prevent all of them from falling to the floor can breaking the precious bottles inside, or they will be severely scolded by a manager (the only time in which we ever see the brother under anyone's direct employment!) Once the truck was eight boxes full, it roared off while you took a short breather. Because your role in the game was somewhat monotonous (but not necessarily boring,) Mario Bros. was one of the few games where you could enter into a hypnotic rhythm, moving back and forth in time with the boxes.

### **Green House**



Green House was a far less popular game, but pretty fun none the less.

It was, I believe, the original appearance of Stanley the Bug-man, who went on to extremely limited fame against Donkey Kong in Donkey Kong 3 (also a Game & Watch title featuring Stanley). In Green House, it is merely Stanley against the elements. Stanley has four particular flowers that he is concerned with, each in it's own corner of the screens. The top two flowers are attacked by waves of worms that originate from the center of the top screen. The worms are easy to deal with. One puff of bug spray, and they're gone. On the bottom screen, however, two spider webs are situated above the two lower flowers. Spiders climb down the webs to eat(?) the flowers. Spiders are a little more hardy than the worms are. Unless the blast of spray hits them right in the face when they are at the bottom of a strand of web, they are only temporarily repulsed from the flower. You must hit them when they're right on top of the flower in order to kill them permanently. All together, what you end up with is a juggling act that is surprisingly addictive. You must judge how much time to have to deal with every potential threat to your flowers. Sometimes you must repel a spider because waiting for it to reach the end of the web will take too long and a worm will eat one of the top flowers by then. Sometimes you must allow a worm to get dangerously close to one of the top flowers because trying to take it out too soon will allow a spider to slip off the web and eat one of the bottom flowers. It takes some practice, but eventually you get a feel for what it will take to protect all of your flowers.



## Fire

Fire was another less popular title, but it was pretty well known at my lunch table. Fire presents the classic scene of desperate rescue-ees jumping out of a burning building and on to the safety of the capture tarp below. Unfortunately, the tarp that your firemen are using is rather elastic, and it causes the jumpers to bounce back into the air two times before finally coming to rest in the ambulance on the right. On the easy game, jumpers escape from the top two floors, while in the hard game, even the second floor has no safe escape route other than jumping, so there are more problems to deal with. Once a jumper leaves the building, it is your responsibility to position yourself underneath them every time they are just about to hit the pavement. Only when they safely reach the ambulance can you stop worrying about them. At its worst, you must sometimes juggle five or six people as they depend on you to save all of their lives. It can become quite stressful. But still, a nice way to pass a third grade lunch.



Lunch back then was a lot more entertaining than lunch can be today when you work at your desk to get stuff done on occasion. Of course, thanks to sites like eBay, you can still get in on the fun, although as eBay has a habit of doing to retro collectable stuff, prepare to shell out quite a few dollars if you want to pristine complete thing with the box, the manual, and the battery cover. For those of you who are willing to pay that kind of money, another alternative is to seek out the Game Boy Color and Game Boy Advance. They don't quite recreate the exact feel of holding the same dedicated handhelds, but they're much cheaper and they also contain updated versions with new graphics to boot. There are also a couple of flash recreations of these games. Improper emulation of timing is usually an issue with these remakes, but check some of them out at <http://www.handheld.remakes.org/online.php>.

There are a lot more Game & Watch goodies out there, like the aforementioned Donkey Kong Jr. tabletop, which was the only Jr. game where you could actually lose the key you were holding and have to go all the way back to collect another one, or the Donkey Kong 3 handheld which was part of

a G&W design that contained separate control pads for two players and allowed for head-to-head competitive play. I'd like to cover them all, but with so many Famicom games to report on, it may be difficult to find time for them all. If you're truly interested in reading more about the Game & Watch series, send us a line and let us know. See you next month with another batch of Famicom games!



## ***Old Wine in New Bottles: Retrogaming on Modern Hardware***

***by Jonathan H. Davidson***

For this special 40th edition of Retrogaming Times Monthly, I'm going to do something a bit different. Rather than review a software package, the product this month is the Namco TV Games (released by Jakks Pacific, 2003).

This plug-and-play system includes five classic arcade games: Bosconian, Dig Dug, Galaxian, Pac-Man, and Rally-X. There are all great games (with the possible exception of Rally-X) with no filler material. All of these titles are available on the Namco Museum series for the PlayStation (reviewed last month).



Unlike more sophisticated emulators, there are no difficulty settings or other options. There is no pause function. I have not played the arcade version in many years, but both Galaxian and Dig Dug seem to be much harder than I remember. I never played Bosconian or Rally-X in an arcade, so I cannot comment on the relative difficulty level of those games.

The quality of the graphics is certainly adequate, but they do look a bit fuzzy. The colours in Dig Dug appear a bit too over saturated and bright. There are also some subtle details missing, such as the level indicators in Dig Dug. The collision detection in Pac Man also seems to be a bit off; I am not sufficiently familiar with the arcade game to know if the old patterns still work on this game. Bosconian requires some fairly vigorous joystick manoeuvres, but the other games are more responsive.

The hardware itself is very well made. The joystick feels solid and the base is easy to grasp. The system requires 4 AA batteries. It connects directly to the video inputs on any modern TV or VCR (or even an old C=64 monitor).

As with all of the various types of TV games, this system is clearly aimed at the casual gamer rather than experienced retrogamers. I would recommend this system only if it can be found either second-hand or deeply discounted in the clearance bin.

Next month, we will review another Jakks Pacific product - the Activision TV Games system. Feedback on this column is most welcome; special thanks to everyone who have their sent comments and question. Please send e-mail to [jhd@interbaun.com](mailto:jhd@interbaun.com).

## ***Game Over***

Wow. This turned out to be quite the issue. We hope you enjoyed all of the looks back, and we also hope that you'll be here for our next 40, 80, and 120 issues to come! See you next month.

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