

# DIGITAL PRESS

THE Bio-degradable Source for Videogamers

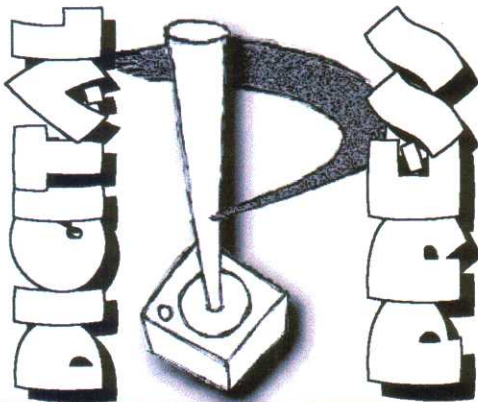


PITFALL HARRY FAMILY  
SURVIVING MEMBERS  
1899

#41:

dignitaries.





**DIGITAL PRESS #41  
CGE 1999**

**Editor In Chief**  
Joe Santulli

**Senior Staff Writers**  
Al Backiel  
Jeff Cooper  
Sean Kelly  
Edward Villalpando

**Staff Writers**  
Tony Bueno  
Clint Dyer  
Dave Giarrusso  
John Hardie  
Howard Hirsch  
Keita Iida  
Russ Perry Jr.  
Scott Stone  
Mark Terry

**Production Staff**  
Dale Curtis  
Liz Santulli

**Art**  
Joe Santulli

**Special Thanks**  
Mommy

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**dignitaries.**

**EDITOR'S BLURB by Joe Santulli**

Hi there. I have a little story to tell you.

A young boy growing up in the Boston area in the late 1910's had become such a huge fan of the Red Sox that he was regarded by his friends and family as the team's greatest fan. He was so dedicated to his team that when the great Babe Ruth went off to the New York Yankees in 1920 the boy "disowned" the Babe. His autographed balls, a tiny wooden statue, a can of soda pop with the Bambino's picture.... all thrown in the trash. The youngster would even jeer loudly at the home games against the Yankees whenever the "Sultan of Swat" stepped up to the plate or was out in the field. Of course, this went largely unnoticed by Ruth, although on a few occasions he could be seen turning to find the face behind the taunts. Whether or not he ever saw the boy will never be known for sure.

In 1927, during a vacation with his family to "The Big Apple" (believe it or not, New York was a vacation spot back then), this young man had the opportunity to see a Red Sox game at Yankee Stadium. The boy did his usual taunts, but he was largely drowned out by the Yankee crowd. After the game, as the boy and his family walked out from the stadium to the parking lot behind the main gate, who burst from the back door in his civilian attire, colliding with the boy as the door swung open? None other than the great one, Babe Ruth. The boy was shocked, he had never seen the Babe THIS close up. He didn't even look like the same person. He was bigger, stronger, and... friendlier than anyone could imagine. "Sorry, son... hey, didja enjoy the game?" the Babe asked him. And all this young man could manage in his awed state was a brief mumble, then "Y-y-yessir... you were great, Babe sir". Ruth pulled a ball from his suit pocket, and signed it, then handed it to the boy. "That's what I was hoping you'd say!" he chuckled, rubbed the young man's shoulder, then strode off into an impossibly brilliant sunset. The ball read: *To my greatest fan, from Babe Ruth*. And in an instant, this youngster was transformed from the Babe's worst enemy to his most endearing fan.

That young boy was my great grandfather.

Now replace The Babe with Tod Frye, and replace grampy John with me, and we could see this whole thing happen all over again. I can only hope Mr. Frye hasn't read my reviews of his Atari 2600 version of Pac-Man, or I'll never get an autograph.

Enjoy the show!



**Pitfall Harry Family Surviving  
Memories 1899**

Among the dignitaries that were NOT be present at this year's convention are the surviving family of the Pitfall Harry clan. Apparently another expedition is underway.

<b>in this issue</b> .....	<b>page</b>
<b>editor's blurb</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>reader retaliation (mail)</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>ROMpage!</b>	
<b>welcome to the cge '99</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>wacky world of alt</b>	
<b>quotables</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>random reviews</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>mind-numbing mumbblings</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>PICS from the show!</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>ralph baer and coleco</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>note-worthy (keita iida)</b> .....	<b>back</b>





## they shoot horses, don't they?

Hello! I'm Robert, & I live in Augusta, ME. I got my 1st (long, brown with gold trims) Intellivision for my 18th birthday, which was in 1982 (17 years ago); I remember that the **Las Vegas Poker & Blackjack** cart was included with the set, & then I got **Horse Racing** (which is S-T-I-L-L my all-time favorite)—I give it a big absolute 10!!!! That sports cart was the one that I played a whole lot!!!! I've yet to see a recent/current PC game of that genre that functions exactly like this common-yet-very-rare INTV gem of a game cartridge. Your review was the very 1st time that I ever heard-or even read-about **Virtua Gallop 1 & 2**, the games you said were strong on the armchair jockey department, but weak on the betting department. On what system(s) those games were originally made for? Does anyone know if any emulators are/will be available for those **Virtua Gallop** games?! Are they like the **Super Pro Horse Racing** game cartridge that INTV CORP. INC. had plan to release?! (Hopefully, we'll see THAT unreleased sim available in volume 2 of *Intellivision Lives*.) Are you a horse racing fan like I am?! Thank You!

Robert Lloyd  
Augusta, ME

*Robert, I take it that you noticed my mention of the Virtua Gallop series right inside my review of the Intellivision Horse Racing game in a past issue of DP or on the website. Well, my fine bridled friend, I'm proud to say that I AM a fan of horse racing, but nowhere near as much as I used to be.*

*For a good span of time (between my senior year in high school and my sophomore year in college), I spent many Saturday nights at the Meadowlands Race Track, betting on the ponies. The "trotters" (jockeys on a tiny chariot behind the horse) were my favorites, it always seemed like you had a better chance playing the odds—less freaky stuff happening than in the "pacer"*

*aces (jockeys on the horse's back). I'd meet with some friends after work and we'd try to get to the track in time for the first daily double. The biggest win I ever had was when we made it with about two minutes left to post so I practically random-picked the first horse in the daily double and ended up winning on a huge longshot.*

*Unfortunately, I lost touch with a lot of the gang I used to hang out with back then, and I've yet to find someone fond enough of the sport to be willing to sacrifice a night for the thrill of it. And I don't consider the "posh" option of ordering dinner in a restaurant overlooking the track and betting through a machine an option at all. In fact, that's just plain boring if you ask me. I mean... where are the characters giving you tips out by the gate? Who's going to run up and down the restaurant "following" their horse as it goes into the final stretch? And what are those steaks REALLY made out of anyway?*

*I'll be back there soon, though. Just writing about it makes me want to snatch up a program and study it while driving 80 miles an hour down Route 3.*

*Oops, you had a question in there, didn't you? The Virtua Gallop series was made for the Play-station but only as an import. I hear the second game may finally make it here to the states!*

## my experience with nolan

The year is 1997, and I'm unemployed (a common occurrence for me these days). A friend of mine (hey Bry) calls me up and tells me that there's an opening for a job at the company he works for (PlayNet Technologies), so I go to check it out (who wouldn't go to check it out Nolan Bushnell works there!). I end up getting a job there and for the first few weeks, I don't get to see "the man" at all, but I see his office and right away, I could tell it's his. Of course, it wouldn't take too much brainpower, because it's the only office with a standup arcade Pong unit in it. Granted, it didn't work, but from what I learned later on, that didn't surprise me.

So, I finally get to meet the man a few weeks into the job. He's walking down the hall talking to the president (grrrrrr if there are any professional hitmen reading this, I have a job for you :) and I'm walking the opposite way. I say "hi", he says "hi", and that was it. And I was awe-struck! That was Nolan Bushnell! Right next to me! He said hi to me! That is when I decided to never wash my mouth or ears again! I really couldn't believe it. I don't know what I expected, but I suppose it would have been "Oh, another one of those" type of attitude or something. You know, like when you see a celebrity and say hi and they turn away and concentrate on anything but that annoying person who's bothering them (not that I know from experience or anything :).

Anyhow, one day, my friend and I were taking a break playing Miner 2049er on the Atari 800 and Nolan walks by and stops to watch. He starts telling us about all these stories about how the second cart port came to be and some of the mistakes they made when they were making the 800. I really couldn't believe it. He was there in my

cubicle talking to us like we were old friends! It was so incredibly cool! My friend tells me that he does this sort of thing all the time and I'm even more impressed.

It comes time for the company picnic and I find out it's at "the man's" house, so of course, I go. We drive up to his place in Woodside (it's no longer his place, so don't get excited) and at first I don't see anything. After about 5 minutes of walking, we finally get to the pool on the outskirts of his house, from which, you can barely just see the house. Now, the pool isn't your ordinary average pool, mind you. It's got a 25-30 foot water slide, a very nice diving board and the area surrounding it is just beautiful with a place to serve food and drinks and a place for the "pool boy" to keep his stuff. So, we play and swim and play some more and have fun and after, my friend says, "Nolan said I could pick up some stuff, so let's go to his place". Another 10 minutes of walking, all the time, this house (although I don't know if I'd call it a house, more like the Winchester Mystery House) looming in the distance. We finally make it to the house and go inside and find Nolan and his family through the maze of networks he calls home.

He's in the kitchen and we have a short conversation with him and he tells us that the stuff he's got for my friend is up in the game room. I'm drooling at this point. I know his game room is going to be cool now just finding it is the trick. So, we go up 3 or 4 flights of stairs and finally end up in the clouds in his game room. And, I'm not disappointed! He's got about 20 classic arcade machines in the room, a huge pool table and lots of Pinball machines and other fun stuff. So, of course, being the gamers we are, we have to play games! Most of the games didn't work, unfortunately, but we did get to play 4 player Dominoes (I think that was the title) where you had to place your dominoes in a row without touching your own rows and knocking over your dominoes. Basically, it's the arcade version of the Tron light cycles game without fancy graphics. Anyhow, it was fun and I doubt I'll ever see the games that he had in that room again!

Well, my friend picked up his games and we headed down the stairs again and said our good-bye's to Nolan and his family and left. On the way out, just for good measure we peeked into his garage and I got to see a non-working arcade version of Touch Me, the later to be made handheld game!

Well, a few weeks later, we all got fired from Play-Net and that was the last I ever saw of him. I was really bummed, because I kept forgetting to get him to sign my copy of Secret Quest. Maybe someday, who knows.

Clint Dyer  
San Mateo, CA

*Someday, Clint. But not at this year's Classic Gaming Expo! We'll have to get along without him this year, but I'm sure his peers will be more than willing to share a few more tales of Bushnell at the event.*



# ROMpage!

featuring  
Sean Kelly

## Welcome to the Classic Gaming Expo '99!

Allow me to introduce myself as this issue of Digital Press will be seen by a number of non-subscribers. My name is Sean Kelly. I write this "ROMPage" column each issue and basically my job is to bitch and moan about things. Things that are right, things that are wrong and things that just piss me off in general. I also happen to be one of the organizers of Classic Gaming Expo which, incidentally, is NOT one of those things that piss me off.

We try to have a theme for each issue of Digital Press and this issue's theme is the celebrities that are in attendance here at the show. As a general rule, my column need not adhere to the theme but this issue it will as I'd like to talk a bit about what makes a celebrity.

My handy-dandy desktop dictionary defines the word celebrity as a "famous or highly publicized individual" and in reading that definition, I'm sitting here trying to figure out just who here at the show would qualify as a celebrity? I mean I would be willing to bet that almost none of the people reading this would have the slightest idea who Bob Polaro is but he'd gain instant "celebrity status" if his name was mentioned in conjunction with his smash Atari 2600 title Defender. On the other hand, the vast majority of everyone reading this would know exactly who David Crane or Garry Kitchen was.

Atari never wanted celebrities working for them because celebrities could command more cash. While cash was most certainly a part of what programmers were looking for, I don't believe it's all they wanted from Atari. Imagine, if you will, Al Pacino starring in his next movie with a paper bag over his head throughout the entire film and his name not listed anywhere in the credits. He'd still get his standard ten million bucks for starring in the movie, but nobody would know it was him. In a sense, Atari was making it's programmers do just that. The game they wrote might sell a million copies and everyone between eight and thirty years old would know the game's main character on sight, but none of them would have the slightest idea who wrote the game.

This was one of the deciding factors in forming Activision. On every game, the programmer's name, and in most cases even their picture, is displayed prominently several places on the packaging and within the game itself. Their names were even mentioned in TV commercials for their games. This wasn't done because the person that wrote the game wanted to double their salary the next time around, they just wanted everyone to know who spent several months creating the game they're playing. That's not such an unreasonable expectation if you ask me.

Most anyone that has or had an Atari 2600 knows about the "microscopic dot" in adventure - it was one of the first "easter eggs" ever. The sad part about the dot is that the reason it was put in there in the first place was so that the poor sap that wrote the game could put his name in the game in such a way that the powers that be at Atari couldn't find it. If they had found it, they would have insisted it be removed. So the programmer puts this dot in the game and it

allows the player to access a secret room in which the programmer's name is displayed. I'm curious though as to how many of you can remember the name displayed in that secret room? Just as I suspected. The damn DOT is more of a celebrity than the programmer!

# CGE'99

The definition of celebrity is lacking something extremely important in my book - class. As I see it, you don't just get to write a videogame, star in a movie, or play a professional sport and instantly become a celebrity - you need to

have class. As I watched the guests at last year's show standing around shooting the shit with the attendees, admiring the stuff that was on display, and generally just having a good time, I thought to myself... "these guys have class!" Ever hang around the ballpark as a kid waiting to get an autograph from one of the players? Remember how many of them would act as if you didn't even exist? There was always one or two players willing to spend some time with the folks that laid-out the cash to come and watch THEM play - those are the true celebrities! Although this line of thinking may not hold true these days because the athletes probably know that 75% of the autographs they sign now will be up on eBay the next day but you get the idea.

So here we are in 1999 and things have changed in the video-game industry quite a bit since Atari was on top. Credits are listed somewhere within each and every game but it's not quite the same. Games are written by teams of designers, artists, musicians, etc. so there's no simple answer to the question of "who wrote Doom?" or the like. Even so, do we know who did the music for Doom? What about the person that "drew" all the characters? I guess without one person that can legitimately claim a game as their own, it doesn't really matter all that much. Even back then though, did you really care who wrote Pitfall? Probably not, but if you heard that David Crane was going to make a public appearance someplace in your neighborhood, at least you'd know who the hell he was and maybe you'd even like to meet the guy and shake his hand.

That's what Classic Gaming Expo is all about. It's a chance to meet some of the people that were responsible for all those broken joysticks way back when and finally get the chance to give them the bill! When you meet some of the celebrities at the show, odds are pretty good that when Howard Scott Warshaw tells you he wrote Yar's Revenge, he really wrote it - ALL of it! When you smack him upside his head for making it so damn hard, you can walk away comfortable with the fact that he alone deserved it and you need not seek anyone else out.

Two final questions. Any idea who wrote the arcade version of Pac-Man? Do you know what a Pac-Man looks like? I rest my case....







## Quotables

Compiled by Al Backiel

"I was running a division at Sanders in 1966 when it occurred to me that you should be able to do something else with a television set than just tune in a channel. The answer was GAMES. By early 1967 it became obvious we should get serious."

\_\_\_\_ Ralph Baer (VG & CE Jun'91)

"I remember going to a CES about a year before the crash. Everybody and their brother had gotten into videogames! What we didn't realize was that when they failed, they would dump all their product on the market."

\_\_\_\_ Steve Cartwright (2600 Conn. #6)

"The concept for PITFALL took less than 10 minutes. The difficult part was sitting at the computer, for over 1,000 hours, and making it happen."

\_\_\_\_ David Crane (2600 Conn. #12)

"Did I learn anything at Atari? I learned 6502 assembly code inside and out. God, its been long enough! Almost. I'm beginning to forget details. Isn't that great? I may survive."

\_\_\_\_ Tod Frye (Once Upon Atari)

"It's difficult to come up with a fun game which people enjoy playing over and over again. It is easy to come up with a game that is just like all other games. You have to try all kinds of things."

\_\_\_\_ Rob Fulop (VGU Jun'83)

"What really prompted JUMPMAN was my desire to learn the Atari computer. I was trying to emulate Donkey Kong in the sense that I wanted to make a man run and climb. That's how the whole thing started. Putting the Atari to use, seeing if it could do that type of thing."

\_\_\_\_ Randy Glover (VGU Aug'83)

"Tiger reverse engineered the 2600 and flew myself and two other programmers out to their company in Chicago to teach us how to program the 2600."

\_\_\_\_ John Harris (2600 Conn. #42)

"In January 1983 the talk that flooded the convention center at the Winter CES in Las Vegas was the news of Atari's stock dropping wildly and the rumors that the big shake-out was coming."

\_\_\_\_ Leonard Herman (Phoenix)

"If video gaming is to be saddled with a rating system, then we'd better have a neutral administrating body that can set standards for the whole cartridge field. Letting each company determine the ratings of its own products would be deceptive and confusing."

\_\_\_\_ Arnie Katz (EG Oct'93)

"I was going to do a game with a cop chasing a crook. The Keystone Kop was my wife's idea. The cop chases the crook through a department store."

\_\_\_\_ Gary Kitchen (EF&G Apr'83)

"Nobody wants to sit around with a satchel full of controllers, like an electronic golf bag, selecting the appropriate device for each game."

\_\_\_\_ Bill Kunkel (EG Jul'93)

"I remember when a half dozen suits came into my lab to see my 2600 VOLLEYBALL while I was wearing a tank top, shorts and sandals. They would then inquire about a round ball."

\_\_\_\_ Bob Polaro (DP#40)

"Many people in the business today seem to be more interested in making movies than in making games."

\_\_\_\_ Tim Skelly (Halcyon Days)

"YAR'S REVENGE, I believe, still stands as one of the only games in which the source code is displayed on the screen. You had to use everything at hand."

\_\_\_\_ Howard Scott Warshaw (Once Upon Atari)

"I can remember the day in the lab when me and Rob (Fulop) decided to tie the two games together. We started kicking around the idea of the survivors from ATLANTIS showing up in COSMIC ARK with the mission to go from planet to planet getting two of every creature to repopulate Atlantis."

\_\_\_\_ Dennis Koble (VG Jan'83)

"Remember it's not the dragon that gets you - it's the DRAGON-FIRE!"

\_\_\_\_ Robert Smith (Numb Thumb News #2)

"My last name is Turmell and all along I thought TURMOIL would be a good name for a game. Very frequently the name comes before anything else."

\_\_\_\_ Mark Turmell (EF&G Nov'82)

"A game is automatically dubbed 'classic' when an 'updated' version of it is released ten or more years later. Yep, I just made that rule up. So deal with it."

\_\_\_\_ Joe Santulli (Digital Press)



# ROBERT SMITH



## Atari 2600

## Atari/Imagic/PB

## Various



**Medley review**  
by Joe Santulli,  
former "The  
Cure" groupie

Element	Dragonfire	Riddle	Msweeper
Graphics	7	7	9
Sound	5	3	7
Gameplay	8	9	8
Overall	8	8	8

multi player same time		data save features
decent game ending	X	hidden stuff
variable skill levels	X	non-linear gameplay

I grew up having TWO Robert Smiths to look up to. There was the Robert Smith who played front man for the pre-Goth alternative band The Cure, and there was the Robert Smith who designed some superb titles for the Atari 2600. The main difference between these two fellas is that one Robert Smith makes you want to brood in a dark corner, wishing you were with a woman that doesn't exist, while the other Robert Smith makes you want to save the world. The fact that I admired both of these Robert Smiths equally all of those years is probably the reason why I've become such a confused adult.

You know his games. **Dragonfire**. **Moon-sweeper**. **Riddle of the Sphinx**. **Video Pinball**. **Star Wars Arcade**. He did them all for the Atari 2600, and there isn't a gamer out there that hasn't marvelled at each of these titles in their day.

My favorite Smith game is **Riddle of the Sphinx**. You don't hear people often talking about this one, and that's surprising. It is essentially an early action-based role-playing game. You're the prince of Egypt, setting out into the desert wild to defeat the evil god, Anubis. Along the way, you will encounter treacherous thieves and deadly scorpions. There are palm trees and obe-

lisks that act as protection or obstacles, depending on your situation. There are pools to replenish your energy, and treasures hidden inside of temples. Traders may screw you in many deals – or really come through with a useful item. And there are a bunch of different items. The game is very deep, requiring not only resourceful inventory management and patience, but a pretty accurate trigger finger as well. The graphics are excellent, although the desert isn't a hard thing to draw. There aren't many sounds in the game either. Still, the result is a game that captures the feel of the desert, a remarkable accomplishment.

Far more popular in the Robert Smith gallery is the multi-platform hit **Dragonfire**. This is quite a different style of game, requiring lightning fast reflexes. In the first screen, you storm the castle gates. Well actually you just run head-on towards them. Fireballs approach from high and low and you'll have to duck and jump to get past them. In other versions of the game, an archer fires arrows from above as well, but the Atari 2600 had limitations that Smith dealt with rather nicely. Once you've entered the castle, it's mano-a-dragon as you race around the room collecting treasure while a fire-breathing dragon

does his best to torch you. Once all of the treasures are collected, an exit appears. Get there, and you're off to another castle gate, this time a bit faster than the one before. Eventually, fireballs come at you so fast that you have to play the game on raw instinct. I like that. I also like the game's graphics and sound, which like **Riddle of the Sphinx** are simple but perfect for the game.

**Moonsweeper** is a combination shooter and rescue mission. You pilot through deep space searching for a moon to land on while avoiding space debris. There's a really innovative "zoom in" to the moon surface when you land that I remember being a jaw-dropping effect at the time. On the surface, you have to drift over people while navigating around pylons and enemy saucers. Another innovation was the ability to fire ahead or into the sky to knock out the mother ship that continually drops those enemy saucers. And once you've rescued the quota of people you have to reach maximum velocity to escape the moon's gravity. Really cool stuff!

He may not be able to sing "Just Like Heaven" like the OTHER Robert Smith, but this one really made the Atari 2600 sing, and that's quite a feat indeed.



Smith orchestrated some unprecedented effects in **Moonsweeper**



Another innovation – TWO joysticks to play the complex **Riddle of the Sphinx**



I'll take the metal urn for 40 and the djinni bottle for 90, Pat



## Atari 2600

## Atari

## Action



**Medley review**  
by Russ Perry, Jr.  
and his tiny  
friends

Element	Taz	Asterix	Quadrun
Graphics	5	5	7
Sound	4	4	4
Gameplay	9	9	9
Overall	7	7	8

multi player same time		data save features
decent game ending	X	hidden stuff
variable skill levels	X	non-linear gameplay

Let's start out with Taz...

The first thing you see is a giant picture of Taz (Warner Bros.'s Tasmanian Devil of cartoon fame) himself, which, though a bit creepy (maybe if he moved a little), is fairly impressive – it's always impressed me that they can make big and reasonably detailed pictures on the 2600. Within the actual game, however, Taz is pictured in his whirling dervish form, a small tornado, and it isn't animated much either.

Also, the sound isn't all that impressive, as it's confined to only two real sound effects and a couple sonic indicators for in-game events; no game music, no real variety in sounds, and kind of sparse use of the ones it has.

But graphics and sound aren't really the important thing... The gameplay, while simplistic, can become quite frantic. The basic idea is that you have to collect foodstuffs (burgers, root beer, ice cream cones, popsicles, and others, each worth an increasing amount of points), while avoiding sticks of dynamite. This all takes place in an arena of sort made up of 8 rows.

You can move anywhere within these rows, while either a food item or a stick of dynamite will enter one side of a row and

leave the other. It's a pretty simple concept, but one that allows a good ramping-up of difficulty. At first, objects sort of meander across, but on later levels, they really go whipping by. Also, on earlier levels there is more time between a lane emptying (when you grab a food item, it's point value is displayed, and until it disappears, the lane will remain empty) and the next object passing through, whereas later on there's an almost constant flow of stuff across the screen.

Also, the foodstuffs can be difficult to distinguish from dynamite at times. For instance, you start with burgers, and at 2500 points progress to mugs of root beer; at 7500, to ice cream cones, and at 17500, to popsicles. But these popsicles look similar to the dynamite enough to make you screw up at times and die when you shouldn't.

At 10,000 points you get an extra Taz, and at other times thereafter (30,000 and 50,000 for example – perhaps every 20,000 points?), and you're going to need them. At 32,500 you enter a "Crazed Wave" in which stuff just FLIES across the screen (starting with apples and then radishes?), and it is about then that your pulse REALLY starts to quicken.

I don't know what my record was as a

child, but frankly, at my "advanced age", with my failing eyesight, and wrists I messed up a couple jobs back, I can't seem to reach even 70,000 any more. I'm sure there is more stuff in there awaiting discovery, but you're going to have to be fast, and accurate, to find it all. And if you do, let me know if the Crazed Wave ever ends. :-)

Some tips I can give you... Where there WAS an object, you're temporarily safe. If you nabbed a food item, the point value is displayed and it's safe to stay in that lane until it disappears. If dynamite has passed by, it won't turn around, so feel free to take a quick break behind it. As far as I can tell, there are no time constraints, so don't feel it's necessary to run out and grab every food item you can, because the extra risk will lead to more deaths and therefore lower scores (not that I follow my own advice).

To sum up, Taz is for people who like reaction contests. It's all about dodging, and precise movement of Taz. If your joystick isn't very precise, or you're not very coordinated, don't expect to rack up very high scores, but this is a fun little game.

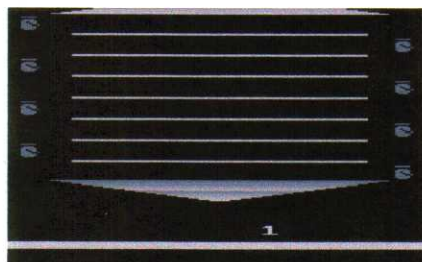
Now, Asterix, on the other hand...

Oh, who am I trying to kid? Asterix is

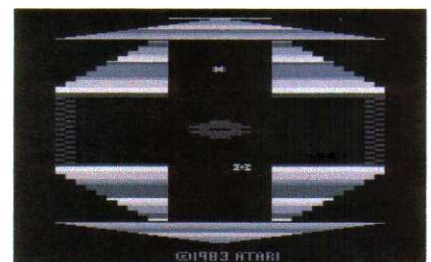
(Continued on page 11)



Pretty outstanding opening screen, wouldn't you say?



Asterix is remarkably similar to Taz but more endearing to Brits.



Quadrun: How'd he get this thing to TALK?



# STEVE CARTWRIGHT



## Atari 2600

## Activision

## Action



**Medley review**  
by Dave Giarrusso,  
despite being  
shot, drowned,  
and frozen.

When Steve Cartwright sat down to produce a new 2600 game, I wonder if he ever said to himself, "Okay, Steve, today's the day I begin work on that new 2600 cart I have to write. Hey, that's kinda funny. I'm Steve Cartwright, and I write carts." Then he'd go to the insurance office or the bank or someplace where he would have to fill out some kind of forms, and a conversation would ensue that would sound a little something like this:

Banker: "Name?" Steve: "Cartwright."  
Banker: "Occupation?" Steve: "Cart write."

How many carts could a Cartwright write if a Cartwright could write carts? Five: **Barnstorming**, **Megamania**, **Seaquest**, **Plaque Attack**, and **Frostbite**.

If you've ever wondered how quickly you could fly a plane through twenty five barns, (how many barns could a barnstormer storm...) then **Barnstorming** is the game for you. The first game produced by Steve was also the first Activision game I played. While it didn't particularly blow me away, it's a fun contest, and has simple, but very adequate graphics. **Barnstorming** is a race against the clock, where the object is to see just how many farmers you can piss off by piloting your biplane through a prede-

Element	Megamania	Seaquest	Frostbite
Graphics	4	5	6
Sound	5	5	7
Gameplay	6	7	8
Overall	5	7	8

multi player same time		data save features
decent game ending	X	hidden stuff
variable skill levels	X	non-linear gameplay

mined number of open barn doors in the shortest possible amount of time. Throw a few geese and windmills into the mix for good measure and even the Wright brothers' mettle would be tested. Looking back at **Barnstorming**, it looks like a testing ground for what Steve wanted to make the VCS do, and how he could make it do it - a good effort for the first time out of the gate.

After warming up with **Barnstorming**, Steve went on to produce the mega-hit **Megamania** for the 2600. Based loosely on Sega's 1981 coin-op **Astro Blaster**, **Megamania** is the Space Nightmare that was every kid's dream back in the eighties. The premise is simple: stuff is attacking you from the air, a la **Space Invaders**, and you must blast everything airborne with your cannon before you run out of energy. Unlike **Space Invaders**, however, the attackers never land, and each variety has a different attack pattern. After defeating the hordes of Hamburgers, Cookies, Bugs, Radial Tires, Diamonds, Steam Irons and Bowties, the player is attacked by a wave of the spectacular Space Dice. Managing to get past the dreaded dice launches the gamer into another wave of the Hamburgers and the whole thing starts again, but with increased

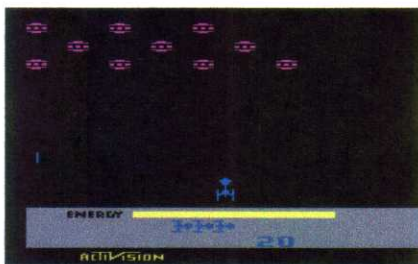
difficulty and different colors.

While there aren't a lot of sound effects in **Megamania**, the ones that are present are excellent and appropriate. In fact, the sound made when a target is hit, best described as an echoing "boing" on top of a bass drum, is so essential to the gameplay that when it was foolishly left out of the **Activision Classics** Playstation CD, I completely gave up on the disc. True story.

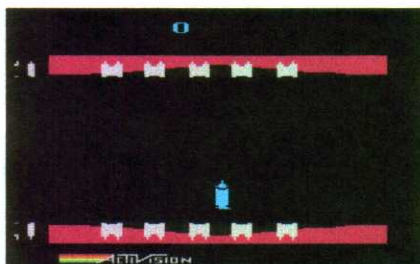
With the resounding success of **Megamania** under his belt, Steve moved in a slightly different direction for his next hit game, **Seaquest**. While the **Swordquest** (funny, they both end in "quest") series would have moved from the water into the air, Steve went from shooting things in the air to shooting them in the water. In **Seaquest**, the player captains a submarine that must rescue lost divers and eliminate sharks and enemy u-boats, all the while keeping a vigilant eye on the oxygen gauge. In addition to **Megamania's** gauge concept, **Seaquest** borrows some of the sounds from **Megamania** and has wonderful "under the sea" graphics.

In **Plaque Attack**, the battles take place in

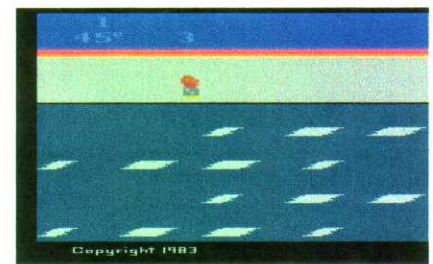
(Continued on page 11)



Arcade game players may find Megamania similar to Astro Blaster



Plaque Attack is a 360 degree variation of Megamania... inside your mouth



You might say Frostbite plays like Q\*bert, but most of us would disagree



## Atari 2600

## Activision

## Action



Joe Santulli reminisces the base-ment years

Some of my fondest memories of youth involve playing Atari for hours on the hottest summer days. Most of the neighborhood youths were outside playing baseball or swimming, while indoors, in a dark room powered by an air-conditioner turned all the way up, my best friend Kevin and I – two social misfits – talked trash while reeling a five-point fish past a pesky shark.

If any programmer pushed the Atari 2600 to it's limits, it would have to have been David Crane. Crane was one of the key designers with Activision from the time of its inception to its final days producing software for the system. Crane designed **Dragster**, **Fishing Derby**, **Laser Blast**, **Freeway**, **Grand Prix**, **Decathlon**, **Pitfall**, **Pitfall II**, and **Ghostbusters** while at Activision, as well as **Canyon Bomber**, **Slot Machine**, and **Outlaw** in the "pre-third-party" era.

You might find this strange, but my favorite David Crane game is **Fishing Derby**, one of his first for Activision. In the game, you go head-to-head against another fisherman as you try to reel in 99 points worth of smelly fish. Spoiling the day is a shark who patrols the water near the surface and will gobble up fish on your hook if he touches it. The fish range in point values, with higher points

Element	Pitfall	Decathlon	Fishing D
Graphics	8	9	8
Sound	7	6	6
Gameplay	8	7	9
Overall	8	8	9

X	multi player same time		data save features
	decent game ending		hidden stuff
X	variable skill levels	X	non-linear gameplay

awarded the deeper you catch them.

The game appears tranquil enough, and certainly the sport isn't going to produce any athletes (except maybe in the 12-oz arm bend competition), but the Atari 2600 version of fishing is absolutely frantic. The fish move about randomly and it takes some practice to get the hang of catching them. Once you do, you have the other player to contend with. The computer is an adequate player, but get someone in there who knows how to play the game and you'll find this **Fishing Derby** to be as fast-paced and furious as any video game can get.

If you've never developed the callus on your thumbs that most of us veteran gamers have earned, there's no better place to start than with Crane's **The Activision Decathlon**. Wrapped up in one cartridge is the 100 meter dash, long jump, shot put, high jump, 400 meter dash, 110 meter hurdles, discus, javelin, 1500 meter race, and pole vault. That's TEN different games! You can choose to play any of these or compete with as many as four players in the decathlon, which cycles through all of the events and keeps score on your progress.

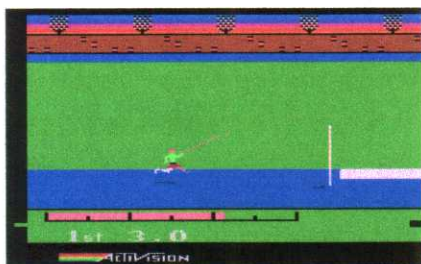
The game has brilliant graphics, the background is a fairly believable arena setting,

complete with crowd and lighting towers.

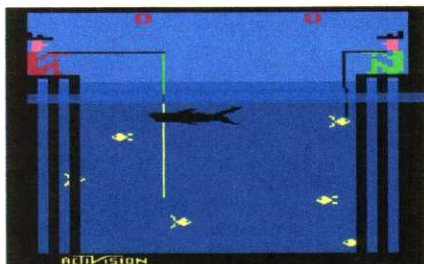
There's even an opening ceremony. The downside to the game is that all of the events require a building-up of speed by jamming your joystick left and right as rapidly as possible. We lost a few joysticks to this game as a result, but the feeling of competition we got while playing made it all seem worth losing a \$10 stick.

Probably the most popular David Crane game is still being updated on modern systems today. When **Pitfall** was released in 1982 it was way ahead of anything that had been done on the Atari 2600 at the time. This action-exploration game featured a huge environment (well, it was a clever trick, anyway) and many different obstacles. Before **Pitfall**, we jumped over rolling barrels. **Pitfall** gave us rolling logs, but also snakes, campfires, alligators, swamps, scorpions, bottomless pits, and opening and closing pits. All in pursuit of the mighty dollar. It was the first game I can ever remember having to draw a map for! And as good as **Pitfall** was, Crane really outdid himself with **Pitfall II** in 1984, which is still an amazing game to witness on such limited hardware.

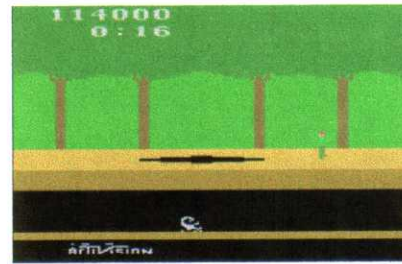
Ah, the days of the Atari 2600. When done right, magic was made.



I used to do this in high school, but not nearly as well as I do in the video game.



You know the old saying: "I'd rather be (playing) Fishing (Derby)".



Betcha didn't think anyone could finish this game.... wrong!



# ROB FULOP



## 2600, 8-bit

## Atari/Imagic

## Various



**Medley review  
by Joe Santulli,  
commander of  
missiles.**

I would have to say that of all the game designers there have ever been, Rob Fulop has created the games "most likely to delight while in a drunken stupor". That isn't to say the games aren't delightful while completely sober (they truly are), but Fulop's use of flashing/fading effects, smoothly moving objects, and high intensity color palettes make the games even more fun when you've "got a few in you". I recently hosted a small party and had some friends over. They couldn't get enough of **Missile Command** or **Cosmic Ark**. Then again, maybe that WASN'T the booze talking.

I have to start with **Missile Command**. To this day, I have yet to play a home conversion so UNLIKELY to be done well on an inferior piece of hardware, yet the Atari 2600 version of **Missile Command** still rocks!

This was the first Atari 2600/VCS game I ever purchased, and for quite awhile it was the only game I played. The game was designed to show off the positives of the Atari 2600 (the flashing effects of an explosion, for example) while avoiding the weaknesses (there is only one missile base). Some designers would try to go balls-out on arcade features and wind up with a mess of a game. Fulop recognized the limitations of

Element	Missile C	Demon A	Cosmic A
Graphics	6	7	8
Sound	7	6	7
Gameplay	9	8	8
Overall	9	7	8

<input type="checkbox"/>	multi player same time	<input type="checkbox"/>	data save features
<input type="checkbox"/>	decent game ending	<input type="checkbox"/>	hidden stuff
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	variable skill levels	<input type="checkbox"/>	non-linear gameplay

the VCS and programmed accordingly. If you haven't played this one in awhile, try it again – not only will it bring back memories, but you won't be able to put it down.

The VCS version of the game is missing the jets that streak across the screen dropping little presents on you, and you'll never see a missile split into two, but you'll hardly notice that once the action heats up. The "smart" ICBM's are as smart as ever, and the game just has the pace and purpose of the coin-op down pat.

**Cosmic Ark** is one of those games that you don't hear people reminiscing about, which surprised me a little. It's like two games in one. The first game is an all-out test of your reflexes, similar the classic arcade game **Space Zap**. Your "ark" remains fixed in the center of the screen surrounded by a hypnotic starlight effect (trippy even while sober). Asteroids appear from each of the four sides of the screen, and you simply have to react by pressing the joystick in that direction to counter the asteroid with return fire. You'd think this would be a pretty easy task, but eventually they're coming at you so fast that any kind of mistake – or hesitation – will cost you a ship.

Survive this wave and you move along to

the planet surface where you try to capture two "beasties" in a tractor beam and transport them aboard the ark. You have a limited time to do this, the creatures move about erratically (and intelligently away from your beam). In later stages, a rising and falling laser beam pressures you to move quickly or lose precious time.

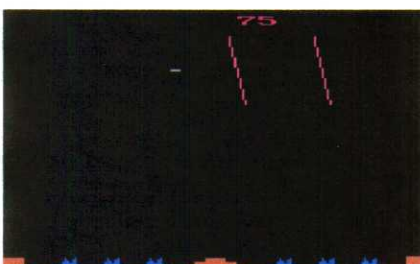
The game is brilliant and colorful. Like Fulop's well known shooter **Demon Attack**, the game seems to hit a peak – and if you've mastered it, you can play on and on. Sure.

**Demon Attack** was one of the first third party titles available for the Atari 2600, as well as a debuting game for the company called Imagic. At its core, **Demon Attack** is similar to Centuri's **Phoenix**, where your ship is being attacked by a horde of space birds that can split into two when hit, fly erratically, and have deadly weapons. In fact, there was a lawsuit filed against Imagic stating the same. Fulop and Imagic won that one.

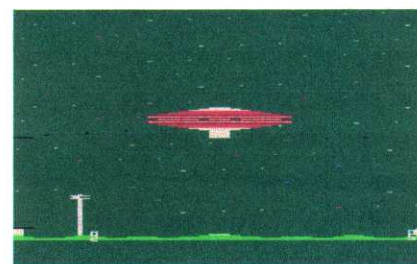
**Demon Attack**, like **Missile Command**, was a game that sold consoles. Fulop had other memorable Atari 2600 games: he designed the very early Atari title **Night Driver**, the Imagic fish adventure **Fathom**, and his own independently produced **Cubicolor**.



In the days before power-ups, man had only his raw skills to protect him



One of the best home translations ever was **Missile Command** for VCS



I can still trip out to the starlight effects of **Cosmic Ark**



## STEVE WOITA

(Continued from page 7)

really the same game as **Taz**, only with a different cartoon character as the protagonist (the Europeans love Asterix The Gaul, whereas most Americans haven't heard of him; I suspect the opposite is true about Taz).

Since it IS a different character, the opening screen is of Asterix instead of Taz. And in this game, you are not collecting just foodstuffs, but other odd things like shields, lamps, children?; also there is not dynamite but rather some odd harp or lyre looking things.

The point values at which things change are the same, only instead of a **Crazed Wave**, you get an **Obelix Wave**, and you get to control Obelix for a while.

**Quadrun** is the other 2600 game Steve designed, and it's always been one of my favorites, just because it's a bit wacked-out. You also get a big surprise when you press the fire button to start a game - the game talks! It announces its name to you three times in quick succession (and is that by chance Steve's voice?), which is a pretty impressive feat (in fact there is only one other 2600 game with voice, **Open Sesame**). Other than that the game is, like **Taz**, a bit sparse on auditory stimuli.

**Quadrun** seems to be related to **Taz** a bit, as the play area has the same sort of frame top and bottom as it did in **Taz**, only instead of the eight lanes you got in that game, here you get a scintillating octagon with a crossed shaped arena inside.

Moving around the arena is done in an interesting way. While you're in the vertical part, pushing the joystick up or down makes you go to the upper or lower part of the cross (respectively), and you always face (and fire) toward the center. To move to the horizontal part, you just move left or right to the wall, which then sends you to the left or right part of the cross; to get back, move up or down, depending on where you want to end up again. So, there are only two vertical levels you'll be at in the vertical part, and only two horizontal positions you can be at in the horizontal part.

The basic idea behind the game is, like **Taz** again, quite simplistic - you must shoot creatures (five per level) that are travelling in the vertical part of the cross, and at other times must catch creatures traversing the horizontal part of the cross. But **Quadrun** adds a twist to the shooting idea - you only get three bullets, so you have to catch the ones you've fired!

In the first round, versus Goons, it's not that hard - you see where they're coming from (don't let them touch you, or they steal a bullet), get on the other side from them if you're not already there, shoot them, and then go back across to catch the bullet. That certainly sounds simple enough, but it gets trickier, of course. On the second level you run into Snags, which have a center that opens up, allowing bullets to pass right through. On the third level you face Yo-Yos that change direction, forcing you to shoot from the opposite side as you normally would. On the fourth level you meet Nods who speed up halfway across, which means you've got to position yourself faster than in the prior levels. On the fifth level you find Brats, who

bounce from side to side as they travel up or down. And so on! [which is to say I can't seem to get any further than that anymore, assuming I ever could].

And to complicate matters further, you have a time limit that will eventually run out, so if you keep missing the creatures - even if you catch every bullet - you eventually lose the game. Also, the horizontally moving creatures must be captured before you can go back to shooting the others, and though there is no direct penalty for not catching them, in the mean time the clock is ticking down.

Tips? Know thine enemy - understand how each creature acts, and learn how to deal with them. I find it helpful to always be at the top and go where I need to be, but at the very least after you catch a horizontally travelling creature be sure to get back to the vertical part right away, since time is always counting down, and you don't want to miss an opportunity to shoot a creature while you dawdle in the wrong area. To catch those guys when they're being uncooperative, it usually works to just jiggle the joystick left to right until they come to you.

Summary? When you get past the Goons, you'll find that the creatures you're shooting at can get your heart racing a bit, as you'll be trying to keep them from hitting you and stealing a bullet, and yet get in the right place to shoot them, and THEN get back to catch the bullet. This game doesn't have quite the twitch factor **Taz** has, but it's an intriguing little contest all in all.

## STEVE CARTWRIGHT

(Continued from page 8)

the dark recesses of... a MOUTH! In a game that affluent dentists handed out to patients, in lieu of a new toothbrush, with each checkup, the player must use their tube of toothpaste to shoot down junkfood before it successfully rots all of the teeth in sight. The game always brings a poster from the dentist's office to mind: "The minute you finish eating your dinner, your dinner starts eating your teeth." While the poster was meant to frighten children into remembering to brush their pearly whites, **Plaque Attack** prompted them to do the same thing by virtue of being a fun and hip video game. **Plaque Attack's** lineage can be traced back to **Megamania**, but in this contest, enemies attack from above and below, with our ever shrinking toothpaste tube caught in the middle. Great graphics and sound, as well as challenging gameplay make this cart a winner.

Steve's VCS swan song, **Frostbite**, challenged **Megamania** as the most played Cartwright cart in our house. With a decidedly **Q\*Bert** feel, **Frostbite** became a fast favorite with its flashy graphics and frantic frozen gameplay. As a denizen of the arctic, the player must guide their onscreen persona (Frostbite Bailey, I believe) up and down a screen of four horizontal rows of moving ice blocks in an effort to build an igloo in which to temporarily seek refuge from the cold. He has no time for dawdling though - the temperature starts out at a chilly 45 degrees and steadily drops - if it hits zero, he becomes a popsicle. Killer crabs, clams, and



birds, as well as the icy depths of the frozen sea, complicate our hero's construction effort. Completing and entering the igloo ends the current round and tallies up the points before progressing to the next round.

There are lots of very nice, subtle touches in **Frostbite** that demonstrate Steve's knack for game design. After the sun sets in the game, the screen darkens, and a flickering light shines through the open igloo door. Small fish serve as bonus points to the expert marksman, and in later stages, a polar bear arrives to terrorize us. As the game progresses, and speeds up and increases in difficulty, our hero is blessed with the ability to maneuver a bit more while in mid jump in order to avoid the pesky sea creatures. A misstep results in the agonized flailings and screams of a man who knows he has been beaten.

In the 2600's heyday, we owned each and every one of Steve's carts, but **Megamania** was the game most likely to tick off my piano teacher. If I happened to be involved in a particularly enthralling game, (read: going for a new high score) that accidentally happened to overlap my lesson time, she simply had to wait it out while I shouted, "I'll be right there..." from the other room. I dunno what she was irritated for, she still got her paycheck for torturing me. Today, I can still be found in front of the television set with **Megamania**, **Seaquest**, or **Frostbite** plugged into my VCS, but now, **Frostbite** wins the popularity contest, and alas, I don't own a piano.

## KICKMAN

Bally/Midway, for Arcade  
Digitary: Brian Colin

Which ONE of the following items doesn't belong?

- A) Balloons
- B) Pac-Men
- C) Fish
- D) Unicycles
- E) Clowns
- F) Bombs

If you said, "F) Bombs," you're wrong. The answer, of course, is "C) Fish." If you're looking for a nice fun, fish-filled videogame, grab a copy of **Fishing Derby** and your Atari 2600 and knock yourself out. The rest of the items listed above are all elements of the fantastic arcade game, **Kickman**, or depending on where you played it, "Kick", man. It was released with both titles.

Once upon a time, I remember reading an article that said something to the effect of, "...can you imagine a **Pac-Man** sequel that DIDN'T make it?" I know a lot of people would immediately point to **Pac-Land** (though I happen to like that game quite a bit), but the author was referring to **Kickman**, a game that I've always considered a **Pac-Man** crossover or even a spin-off, but not really a sequel. The article may have gone on to say that **Kickman** began as a sequel, but didn't end up as one. Whatever it said, the magazine has been defunct for over ten years now, but I'm still playing **Kickman**.

In **Kickman**, you assume the guise of a mild-mannered, unicycle riding, machine-gun totin' clown, who maneuvers only to the left and the right of a one point perspective cityscape via a horizontally con-



strained trackball. Wait, scratch the machine gun. He does have a hat pin up his sleeve though. Two round, oversized, orange, backlit buttons sit on either side of the trackball, marked "KICK"

When pressed, they cause the clown to kick (you don't say) his big clown feet out to either side of the unicycle. Pressing the button repeatedly and rapidly causes ol' Clownie to bust a groove. Almost.

Why would we want to make our unicycle riding clown kick? A valid question. Above our hero are several balloons, twelve at the outset, then twenty four after the first board. In a sort of "Circus Atari-in-reverse" tactic, Clownie's job is to catch all the balloons on his head, without dropping any. If one should fall past his head, he needs to hurry up and KICK it back up in the air with his big floppy clown feet, and then catch the balloon on the rebound. Should a balloon fall down past the Clownmeister and fail to be kicked, WHAM! He promptly falls off his unicycle, his hat falls off, he screams out "crappity-crud!" (oops, maybe that was me yelling), and any balloons that were on his head bounce on his back and off the screen. Oh the pain!

The first board is very easy: simply try to catch the balloons on your head where they will immediately pop. If you're a greedy pointmaster like me, you can kick each one of them first for a nice 2000 point bonus upon completion of the round.

After round one, catching the balloons on your head makes them pile up in a column on your hat. The more you catch, the less distance the balloons have to travel before catching them, and consequently, the less time you have to maneuver Uni-clownie underneath them. After catching the maximum allowed number of balloons, Clowninator will pop them all with a pin in his hand, and you'll warp back to the center of the screen. Unless...

Unless there happen to be **Pac-Men** on the screen. If you catch a **Pac-Man**, he will eat any balloons on your head on the way down (more points), or, if he's already on your head and the balloons max out, he'll just look up and eat 'em all (fewer points). During later rounds, the monsters from the Pac-series also make an appearance, and score the most points of any of the targets.

Clear a couple of rounds, and you'll find yourself hanging out between a couple of skyscrapers on the bonus stage. Evidently, the people who live and/or work in said skyscrapers have balanced their check-books and/or finished writing their hundred page briefs,

# Rand om reviews Lite



and have nothing better to do than hurl balloons, and the occasional bomb, at Mr. Happy Clown. Clownie must catch all the balloons and steer clear of the bombs in order to receive the big points. I find it odd that catching an exploding bomb doesn't "kill" Clownie, (no lives are lost during the bonus round) but failing to catch a balloon does. It's just that "bonus round logic" hard at work.

As the game progresses, the difficulty is increased by faster dropping targets and, multiple simultaneous falling targets. That is, if one balloon falls, and you fail to catch it, and you kick it in an effort to catch it on the rebound, good luck! Another balloon has already started falling, so now you'll have to successfully juggle BOTH balloons in an effort to escape the dreaded unicycle dismount ("death.")

This game is incredibly fun. For starters the beautifully cartoony graphics are superb, and the background, while simple, gives the scene plenty of depth without overpowering the action (heads up, Capcom). The music won the 1981 Grammy award for "Best circus-theme music in an arcade video game," and the sound effects are perfect. We are even treated to many of the sounds of *Pac-Man*: the *Pac-Man* "siren" goes off when Pac heads down the screen; upon landing on Clownie's head, we hear the Pac-death theme; and when Pac scarfs down the targets, we get the Pac-goblin' sound. Gotta love those gaming-crossovers.

*Kickman* is a wacky game that, after the first few rounds, rivals classic aerobic workouts like *Track-N-Field*, *Marble Madness*, *Atari Football*, or *Dunk Shot*. If you've missed that lunch-hour step class or your racquetball partner decided that he or she needed to grout the kitchen tile instead of meeting you at game time, head on down to the arcade and play a few rounds of *Kickman*. Make it to the fourth round and you'll be sure to burn off the extra calories from that luncheon of steak and crab legs. If you don't like clowns because of some irrational fear of them that sprung out of a childhood circus trauma, you'll still dig *Kickman*. Just let those balloons sail on past Clownie and watch him eat the pavement a couple of times. Or ten. — Dave Giarrusso



## NFL BLITZ

Midway, for N64  
*Dignitary: Mark Turmell*

Though Mark Turmell is listed as the head designer of Midway's instant arcade classic *NFL Blitz*, he was not on the team that translated the game to the N-64. I would guess that this version is close enough to the original, however, to allow us to consider the game a Turmell creation.

I need spend little time on description. I can't imagine that too many readers are unfamiliar with *NFL Blitz*, a football version of *NBA Jam*, which Turmell also designed. *Blitz* won numerous awards from the glossy mags as home sports game of the year, and deservedly so. One mag argued, in effect, that if you buy

*Blitz*, you do so at the risk of rendering every other football game in your collection obsolete. That's pretty much true IF you are a fan of arcade-style action as opposed to the strategy and simulation elements of football.

The *NBA Jam* comparison works very well for *Blitz*. *Jam* was WAY more popular than any of the countless basketball videogames that preceded it. Yet some hoops fans hated *Jam* because "it isn't basketball." Same thing with *Blitz*. Like *Jam*, it's enormously popular,



it's violent, it captures a lot of the fun of the sport, and it simplifies the game to the point where anyone can just pop in the cart and begin playing. It provides a

very different experience than many of the fine football sims out there. But if, like me, you're just looking for a shot of adrenaline-pumping arcade fun, *Blitz* can't be beaten. It's wildly addictive and merits all the success it has achieved.

I would not say, however, that this game cannot be improved upon. Even if you acknowledge that *Blitz* is no sim, it is not a perfect version of the game it aspires to be. I'll be watching carefully to see whether they iron out some difficulties and make additions to the new version of *Blitz* that is coming for the Sega Dreamcast and other home systems.

One problem with *Blitz* is that it contains the same "catch up" feature found in *NBA Jam*. If you get too far ahead of the computer, there is practically nothing you can do to score or to keep the computer from scoring. Undoubtedly there is some code to shut this off, but I didn't see anyway to do it in the options (as is the case in home versions of *NBA Jam*) or in the manual. I never like it when the computer takes the degree of your success in a videogame out of your hands. If designers want to make success very difficult—fine. But don't leave the feeling that the computer alone is more or less determining what happens on the screen.

And even though the game is no sim, I see no reason why individual players can't enjoy more attributes of their real-life counterparts. *Blitz* does this to an extent, but not enough. Barry Sanders, for example, is not a lethal running weapon. Instead, Detroit has simply been classified as a good running team, and woeful QB Scott Mitchell runs like Forrest Gump. Similarly, it would make little sense to see running backs get zapped by UFOs under the excuse that "the game isn't supposed to be realistic." The UFOs aren't in there, but they might just as well be when you see a three hundred pound lineman catch up to Sanders from twenty yards behind.

Some people are fanatical about "slow down" and act as if any appearance of it automatically wrecks a game. I don't buy that any more than I thought a little "flicker" automatically ruined a VCS or





Colecovision game. Nonetheless, in the N-64 version of **Blitz**, slowdown is more than an aesthetic problem. It's not unusual to get sacked or stopped on the goal line for no reason other than the fact that your runner suddenly begins running in quicksand.

Finally, I've consistently maintained that every sports game should have instant replay and a create-a-player mode; those people who don't care don't have to use them. These sorts of features aren't included in **Blitz**.

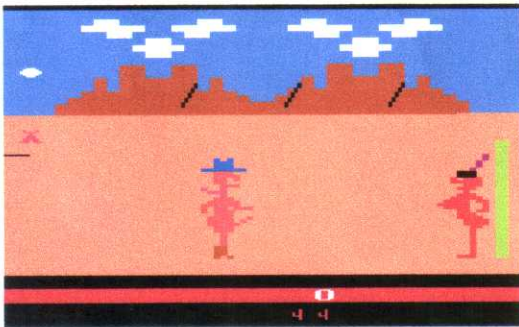
So **Blitz** isn't perfect. But it provides the purest fun of any video football game ever created. Mark Turmell has two amazing hits on his resume with **NBA Jam** and **Blitz**. These games are even more fun than his **2600 Turmoil**. The real challenge for him is going to be baseball. — Jeff Cooper

## CUSTER'S REVENGE

Mystique, for Atari 2600

Dignitary: Stuart Kesten

The advertising department at Mystique must have had a ball with this one. If the premise wasn't offensive enough, the slogan for the game was "WHEN YOU SCORE, YOU SCORE!". Yeah, that wasn't going to get



any woman's rights groups upset. I would also like to note that as a video game historian, I cite **Custer's Revenge** as the first brick on the foundation of the Politically Correct Building, located at One Liberal Street, Anywhere, USA. Because if the women weren't going to beat this game up, native Americans (we used to call them Indians back then) surely were.

And yet it is games like **Custer's Revenge** that make the Atari 2600 library so rich. I only wish that in this day and age there were fearless developers not afraid to stamp the dreaded "M" rating on their games and take their chances with the politicians and housewives with a purpose. When was the last time you saw a game that quite obviously was going to upset someone? Don't say **Thrill Kill** — there's nothing there that you haven't seen before, and even THAT didn't make it out to the public.

Two companies (actually they were the same "company"), Mystique and Playaround, published adult-oriented games in the early 80's. The packaging was exquisite: the box had a fold-out flap similar to Intellivision games, and inside was a small simulated-leather bound case. The case could be locked with a tiny gold lock, which was also included. The fact that any small child (or curious teenager) could easily rip apart the

case and ultimately play the game is besides the point. They made an effort! Each of the games feature some escapade that is decidedly "adult": prostitution, masturbation, fornication, and in the case of **Custer's Revenge**, even rape.

The object of this game is simple — guide General Custer from the left side of the screen to the right, avoiding arrows that hail down from above. When he reaches the far right of the screen, he proceeds to "score" with a bound native American female. Pressing the button rapidly increases Custer's score, but you have to pull away from time to time, as arrows continue to fall. Score as many points as possible before losing three lives.

Yep, that's it. There are no other "hidden secrets" in the game, at least none that have been found by our army of classic gaming commandos. The graphics are pretty good, however — there are smoke signals coming from a distant tee-pee, and Custer and the girl are well-drawn (given the limitations of the system)... at least well enough to be SURE you know what's going on. Custer's character is a classic, dressed only in his hat, bandana, and boots. His "thingy" protrudes three pixels out... I could comment on former DP staff writers at this point but that's just too easy.

The game is fairly collectible but not too difficult to find. Don't settle for the cartridge alone — the packaging makes the game a real conversation piece for your classic gaming collection. — Joe Santulli



## THUNDER CASTLE

INTV, for Intellivision

Dignitary: David Warhol

In the vast ocean of software that no one knows about lies a tiny game whose generic title, lack of advertising, and all around bad timing belie a stunning effort worthy of any "classic". The game is **Thunder Castle**, and despite its hidden status those of us "in the know" (that now includes you) have always included it among our favorite Intellivision games.

Just as Mattel was leaving their sinking ship called the Intellivision, another group was resuscitating it. INTV stepped in and brought the system back to life in the mid-1980's. When you look back at the work INTV did, you can't help but be amazed. Their games were truly groundbreaking Intellivision titles: the wonderful two player "Super Pro" games, the Atari conversions of



Dig Dug and Pole Position, the brilliant pseudo-3D sequel to Burger-time called Diner, high-powered

(Continued on page 17)

Random  
Reviews  
LTC



# MIND NUMBING

## MUMBLING

by Dave Giarrusso

*CGE '99 is upon us, and while reviewing the lengthy list of distinguished guests, I thought I'd jot down some brief thoughts on what these tremendously talented guys and gals meant to me as a video game crazed kid.*

**MR. RALPH H. BAER** - *Legendary inventor and engineer of the Magnavox Odyssey system, the first commercial videogame. "The Father of Videogames."*

I've played the Odyssey on occasion, but my first experience with it wasn't until after Atari had won the gaming crown. Had I played it earlier, there's no doubt in my mind that I would've loved it.

**MR. STEVE CARTWRIGHT** - *Activision designer responsible for the Atari VCS games Megamania, Barnstorming, Plaque Attack, Frostbite and Seaquest.*

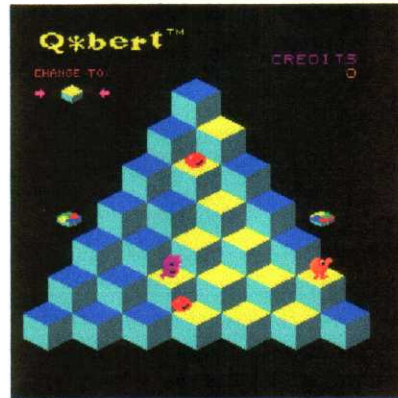
As kids, we determined that Steve was the "cool guy" at Activision based on two things: his press photo, seen in the instruction manuals of his games, and, well, Megamania. It drove us insane. We can still sing the theme song from the commercial, but for the sake of humanity, won't.

**MR. BRIAN COLIN** - *A team member on a number of arcade classics for Midway. Among them are Satan's Hollow, Kickman, Tron, Discs of Tron and Spy Hunter.*

A game with Satan in the title has to be good. This one is outta sight and even plays "Flight of the Valkyries." What's not to love? Kickman stars a clown on a unicycle and Pac-Man. What else do you need to know? Five incredible games, the most popular of which is probably Spy Hunter. In my typical, "not in with the in-crowd" way, I've always liked Kickman the best, followed VERY closely by the TRON duo and Satan's Hollow. I still play Kickman and Tron at the arcade at least once a week.

*at Stormfront Studios, a software company he started in 1998.*

I have never played Utopia. There. I said it - there's a game I haven't played. I'd like to play Utopia! Blame it on my childhood friend Steve, who was the only guy on our block with Intellivision. We spent hours playing Boxing instead. Honest.



**MR. WARREN DAVIS** - *Best known for the arcade hit Q\*Bert while at Gottlieb, he also has Us vs. Them and Joust 2 in his extensive game design resume.*

I always thought he was in those Leprechaun movies, and Willow, but it turns out he had a hand in the decidedly B-movie flick game Us vs. Them - a blast to play, or just to watch. I tossed many a token into the Joust2 machine at our local mall as well. Terrific game.

**MR. JOE DECUIR** - *Joe Decuir was one of the hardware engineers on the Atari 2600, Atari 800 and Amiga 1000, working for Jay Miner. He now works on Windows Networking for Microsoft.*

Gotta give the guy props for plugging away at Stella. Wait a minute. That didn't come out right..

**MS. SHANNON DONNELLY** - *Ms. Donnelly has been a producer and writer for such hits as Dragon's Lair, Space Ace and Thayer's Quest. She is also a respected lecturer and teaches a class on game design at UCLA.*

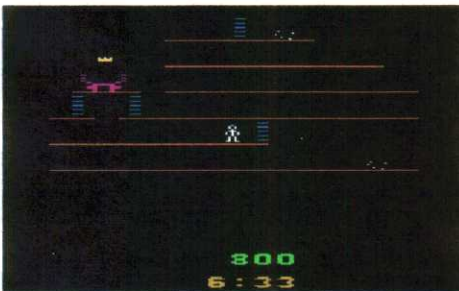
I cannot even begin to estimate how many quarters and tokens I deposited into Dragon's Lair. Just for the sake of argument, let's say, one million. I can, however, estimate the number of quarters and tokens I deposited into Space Ace and Thayer's Quest. Eleven and zero, respectively. Space Ace was, in my preadolescent mind, more difficult than Dragon's Lair, and I never had the good fortune to find Thayer's Quest in an arcade. I've since enjoyed, and defeated, Space Ace.

**MR. JAY FENTON** - *With many arcade titles including GORF to his credit, Mr. Jay Fenton was also the designer of the Fireball home pinball machine and lead the team responsible for the Bally Astrocade home console.*

Here's a secret: "GORF" is "FROG" spelled backwards. Check it yourself if you don't believe me. Is there anyone out there who doesn't enjoy a good game of Gorf? I even recall seeing some tv show hosted by Scott "Cha Chi" Baio where he proclaimed Gorf as his personal favorite game. "Cha Chi Loves Gorf."

**MR. TOD FRYE** - *Programmed Pac-Man for the Atari VCS along with a trio of games that were never released, Shooting Arcade, Save Mary and Xevious.*

Tod redeemed himself after throwing together the, uh, square Pac-Man cart



**MR. ERNIE CORMIER** - *Software engineer at CBS Video Games, where he was responsible for many of the tools used to develop Atari 2600 games. Currently, Mr. Cormier is Vice President of Grolier Interactive.*

Solar Fox, Omega Race, Gorf, and Mountain King

were the big CBS VCS hits at our house. I also find it interesting that Cormier and Grolier have similar spellings, yet, don't rhyme at all.

**MR. DAVID CRANE** - *Co-founder of Activision in 1979, where he designed such classics as Pitfall!, Dragster, Decathlon, Fishing Derby, Freeway and Ghostbusters.*

Crane the almighty is perhaps best known for Pitfall! - I still prefer the original over any of its sequels. I was first turned on to his 2600 gems with Freeway, which I will always remember as containing the best animation of a chicken on the VCS, and Fishing Derby, still the finest, funnest fishing game ever made.

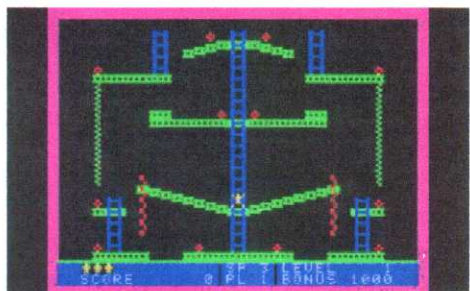
**MR. DON DAGLOW** - *Famed designer and programmer of the hit Intellivision game, Utopia. Director of Applications Software at Mattel Electronics. Currently*



with his rendition of Xevious on the 2600, but it never saw store shelves. Even in its unfinished form, it outdoes his VCS Pac-Man.

**MR. ROB FULOP** - Designed *Demon Attack*, *Night Driver*, *Missile Command*, *Cosmic Ark* and *Fathom* for the Atari VCS, *Space Invaders* (Atari 400/800) and *Night Trap* (Sega CD).

With home runs like *Missile Command* and *Demon Attack*, what more could you want from this man? How about a video game starring the late Dana Plato? The quirky space chase *Cosmic Ark* was a fave in our VCS one summer, and *Fathom* has its merits as well, even though I always got stuck after the third level. I just liked the naked Mermaid. Ooh la-la!



**MR. RANDALL GLOVER** - Creator/programmer/designer of the hit games *Jumpman*, *Jumpman Jr.* and *Summer Games* while at Epyx.

While I could never get into *Summer Games* (I'm generally not a fan of sports video games) the *Jumpman* duo spent tons of time plugged into our Atari 800XL "computer."

**MR. JOHN HARRIS** - Developed *Jawbreaker*, *Frogger*, *Mousekattack*, (all for the Atari 8-bit computers) and *Jawbreaker* for the Atari VCS.

I played *Frogger* on the VCS a lot. Like, a LOT, as in, weeks at a time with no break in between. Believe it or not, I spent even more time playing the incredible Atari 800XL version. "Oh, the camptown ladies sing this song..."

**MR. KEITHEN HAYENGA** - Atari 5200 game designer best known for incorporating speech in *RealSports Baseball* at a time when most home games required a separate voice synthesizer add-on.

Since we had the Atari 800XL, the "5200 pocket," I didn't own my first real 5200 until the late eighties. *RS Baseball* is a decent baseball sim, but for me, the voice was the main attraction.

**MR. ROGER HECTOR** - Director of *Advanced Products* at Atari, where he worked on *BattleZone* and *Warlords*. Later founded *Videa*, which was subsequently purchased by *Nolan Bushnell* and renamed *Sente*. Currently the President of *Universal Interactive*.

Speaking of *Battlezone* and *Warlords*, as much as I like both games on the VCS, if I had to choose only one to play for a week, it'd be *Warlords*, hands down. Make-believe regicide is cool.

**MR. ARNIE KATZ** - Co-founder of *Electronic Games Magazine*, the first and most popular publication devoted strictly to electronic entertainment.

This mag was the only one I ever bought from the store as a youngster, and eventually even subscribed to, shortly before it became *Computer Entertainment*. I fondly recall the original EGM as the place where I first learned of the ColecoVision "Popeye" bug.



**MR. STUART KESTEN** - President and founder of *American Multiple Industries*, which sold the adult games *Bachelor Party*, *Beat 'Em & Eat 'Em* and *Custer's Revenge* for the Atari 2600 under the *Mystique* label.

You've gotta dig these games. As a child, I was so well shielded from the explicit content of these titles that I finally learned of them

via...the local NEWS! Oh, the humanity!

**MR. GARRY KITCHEN** - Creator of *Space Jockey*, *Keystone Kapers* and *Pressure Cooker* for the Atari 2600. For the Commodore 64 computer, he wrote *The Designer's Pencil* and *Garry Kitchen's Gamemaker*.

I played *Keystone Kapers* and *Pressure Cooker* for hours on end, and was always intrigued by the *Designer's Pencil* on the Commie, but never saw it. Something to look forward to then.

**MR. DENNIS KOBLE** - Co-founder of *Imagic*, where he created *Trick Shot* and *Atlantis*. More recently, he was involved in the development of the *PGA Tour Golf* series.

*Trick Shot* was the first *Imagic* game I ever played, and the first one I bought. At *Fay's Drugstore*. For seven bucks. Then I sat up one night trying every possible angle for the trick shot sequence until I could get them all on the first try. Then I never played it again. Ever. A cool game.

**MR. BILL KUNKEL** - Co-founder of *Electronic Games Magazine*, the first and most popular publication devoted strictly to electronic entertainment.

I read about *Thayer's Quest* in the original EGM, and even saw a picture of it in the original EGM, but never saw the actual game. Fortunately, *Joust2*, which, ironically, I never saw in EGM, did wind up at our local mall arcade.

**MR. JERRY LAWSON** - Creator of the first programmable home video game system in history, the *Fairchild Channel F*, in 1976.

The first was "the forgotten" in our neighborhood, where we all had Atari. It's too bad - I would have liked to have played this one back then.



**MR. ED LOGG** - Arcade legend who has hits such as *Asteroids*, *Centipede*, *Millipede*, *Gauntlet*, *Xybots* and *Steel Talons* to his credit.

This guy's been in on so many of the all time greats, it makes you wonder why there's not a giant bronze statue of him at *Twin Galaxies*. You know, like in "Rocky." 'Course, I've never been there. Is there one? Thanks, Ed.

**MR. SAM PALAHNUK** - A well-respected veteran of the interactive entertainment industry, with over twenty-five products shipped in his name including the smash hit 1982 Sega coin-op *Star Trek: Strategic Simulations Operator*.

This vector game is fantastic. I only played it twice in the arcade, but it made a lasting impression on me. I'm not a *Star Trek* fan at all, but this game is outstanding.

**MR. BOB POLARO** - Responsible for the Atari computer hit *Lemonade Stand* as well as such 2600 classics as *Defender*, *RealSports Volleyball*, *Desert Falcon*, *Road Runner*, *Rampage* and *Sprintmaster*.

Mr. Polaro had the daunting task of porting one of my favorite coin-op games, *Road Runner*, to the VCS. He managed to do a phenomenal job with it. Kudos!

**MR. KEITH ROBINSON** - *Intellivision* programmer while at *Mattel Electronics* and designer of *TRON Solar Sailer* for the system. Co-founder of *Intellivision Productions*, makers of "*Intellivision Lives!*," a CD-ROM compilation of the original games for play on the PC and Mac.

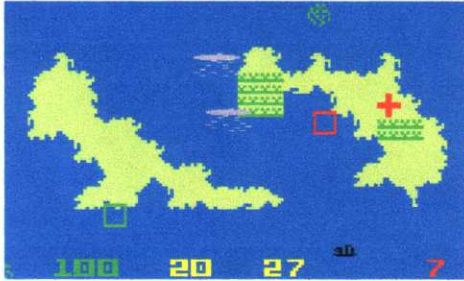
Rumor has it that the *Intellivision Lives!* Disc will soon be available on the PSX. I can't wait!!

**MR. DAVE ROLFE** - Designer of the arcade games *Star Fire* and *Fire One!* For Z-80 based video graphics systems as well as the award-winning game



Beamrider for Activision.

Beamrider is my pick of this list. There's even a version for the VCS!



MR. STEPHEN RONEY - Co-designed and co-programmed the Intellivoice games Space Spartans, B-17 Bomber and Space Shuttle, designed and programmed the unreleased Intellivision game Hypnotic Lights and programmed the Aquarius version of Utopia.

There's that Utopia again. Alright! I'll go find a copy!

MR. SCOTT SANTULLI - Programmer at CBS Video Games. Currently employed at Groiler Interactive.

Santulli doesn't even come close to rhyming with Groiler, but they hired him anyway. Does he know anything about the status of the non-tv-sitcom, non-McCartney version of "Wings"?

MR. TIM SKELLY - Vector graphics arcade game extraordinaire while working for Cinematronics. Created Star Hawk, Warrior, Rip-Off, Sundance, Armor Attack and Star Castle. Also designed Reactor for Gottlieb.

Armor Attack is one of my favorite vector games. Blasting that pesky copter over and over is well worth the price of admission.

MR. JAY SMITH - Founder of Smith Engineering, where he was the mastermind behind the Vectrex, a cartridge-based game system which featured a 9-inch vectorscan display. Founder and CEO of Adrenalin Interactive, Inc.

Everyone loves the Vectrex. Everyone.

MR. ROBERT G. SMITH - Created Video Pinball while at Atari and Star Voyager, Riddle of the Sphinx, Dragonfire, and Moonsweeper for the Atari 2600 while at Imagic. Also programmed Star Wars: The Arcade Game (2600) for Parker Brothers.

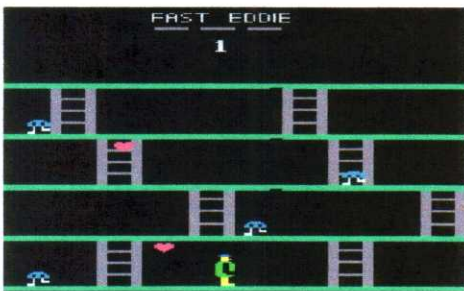
Video Pinball? Played the hell out of it. Star Voyager? We played Starmaster instead, but it's okay. Riddle of the Sphinx? So-so. Dragonfire? A treasure-scarfin' favorite. Moonsweeper? Outta sight. Star Wars: The Arcade Game? Great movie, but Episode I: The Phantom Menace is the greatest of all time.

MR. DONALD A. THOMAS, JR. - Portfolio marketing manager and then customer support manager while at Atari Corp. Currently the Director of Peripherals Licensing and Promotion at VM Labs.

Would he be the right guy to beg for a paddle controller for the Playstation? We need one to play TempestX3, Super Breakout, Pong...

MR. DAN THOMPSON - Apple II game designer best known for Repton and Twerps. Zone Ranger (for the Atari Computers) was another hit that he created.

I played Zone Ranger on my 8-bit Atari, but never saw Repton or Twerps. Twerps is a great title for a game though.



MR. MARK TURMELL - Creator of Beer Run, Sneakers and Free Fall for the Apple II, and Fast Eddie, Turmoil and Gas Hog for the Atari VCS.

Isn't he the same Turmell involved with a lot of the newer Midway arcade titles (NBA Jam series,

MK series)? Turmoil is basic (the guy was only like twelve when he wrote it) but a fun shooter.

MR. HOWARD SCOTT WARSHAW - Atari 2600 game programmer/designer who produced Yars' Revenge, Raiders of the Lost Ark and E.T. The Extra Terrestrial.

The man who gave us Yars' Revenge also gave us Raiders and E.T. Boy, I sure love Yars' Revenge. It's the first Atari game we ever owned.

MR. STEVE WOITA - Designer of Taz, Asterix and Quadrun for the Atari 2600, Kid Chameleon and Sonic Spinball (Genesis) and Waterworld (Virtual Boy).

I always wondered why the "board" for Taz looked so much like the one for Quadrun. Now I know. (...and knowing's half the battle...)

MS. JOYCE WORLEY - Co-founder of Electronic Games Magazine, and concurrently published Electronic Games Hotline, a bi-weekly newsletter which covered the latest news surrounding the hobby.

I once sent a letter to the original EGM explaining how I had found, and others could find, the "ladders of mystery" in Mountain King on the VCS. They never printed it. If I had a copy of that letter today, I'd give all you co-founders a copy. I don't. You win.

## THUNDER CASTLE

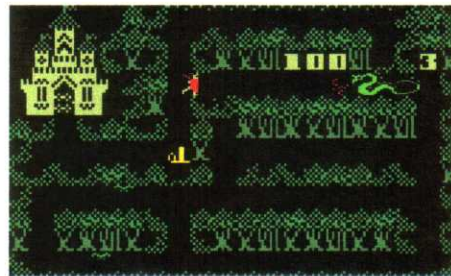
(Continued from page 14)

original titles **Stadium Mud Buggies**, **Thin Ice**, and **Hover Force**... the list goes on. Suffice to say that INTV were pioneers in the "second life" of the Intellivision console.

One of the first games released by INTV was this maze adventure game. It started as a contest winner at Mattel but was abandoned. Dave Warhol picked up the project years later and completed the game for release in 1986. The goal is to slay evil creatures, collect treasure, and progress through the forest, castle, and dungeon. There are magic items and creatures that will aid you in defeating the bad guys (dragons, sorcerors, and demons). Walls open and close, forcing you to think ahead and plan your attack – or escape. Defeat each level's guardian and you move to the next screen.

The general appearance of the game is very similar to Mattel's **Night Stalker**, except that the mazes are somewhat variable (the castle and walls can appear in several locations when you start). Between levels and lives you are treated with some real eye-candy: full-screen level introductions! This was unprecedented on the Intellivision. The gameplay is a bit like **Night Stalker** too, with a little bit of **Pac-Man** thrown in. You use the magic creatures to turn the tables on the bad guys and you can also collect bonus points by walking over stationary magic objects. Throw in a terrific theme song and you have all the makings of a "classic".

If you haven't heard of **Thunder Castle**, I'd recommend you seek it out. It's a jewel for the system and a truly challenging action game. – Joe Santulli







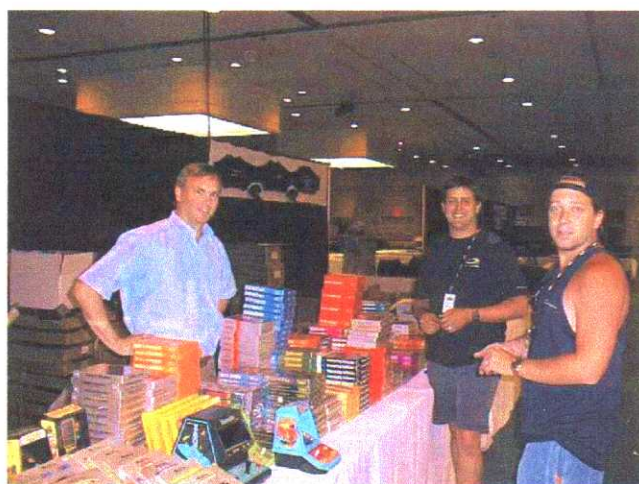
*Clint Dyer carefully replaces the "real game" with a pirate, just before the show.*



*The guys at the B&C booth wonder which looks better: the running demo of Jaguar "Club Drive" or a blank television screen.*



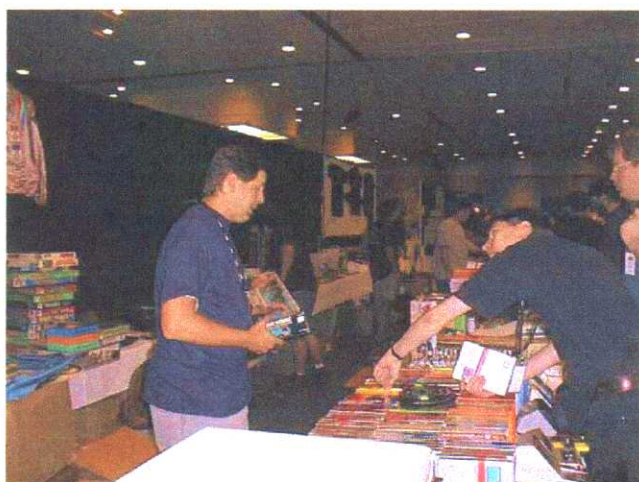
*The Blast From the Past booth being set up. This original, pre-show sign read "fuck all of you losers" but was replaced with the more traditional "welcome" sign.*



*Jeff Cooper, Clint Dyer, and Tom Keller pretend everything is under control as they discuss ways to hide the dead stripper under the table.*

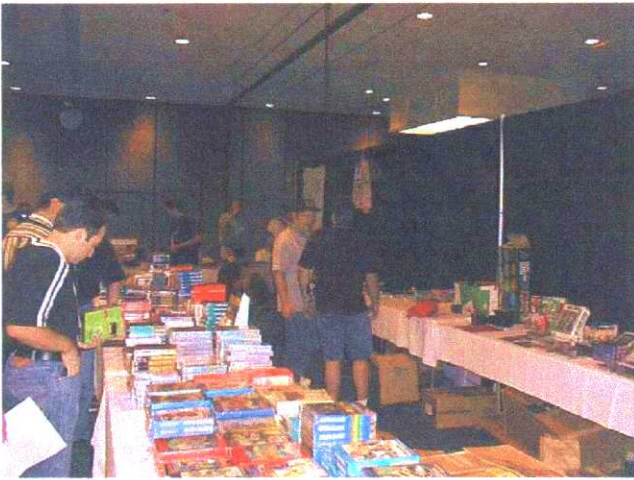


*A battle of wills breaks out – the scene gets intense – then Keita Iida steps in to break things up with a witty line from Confucius.*

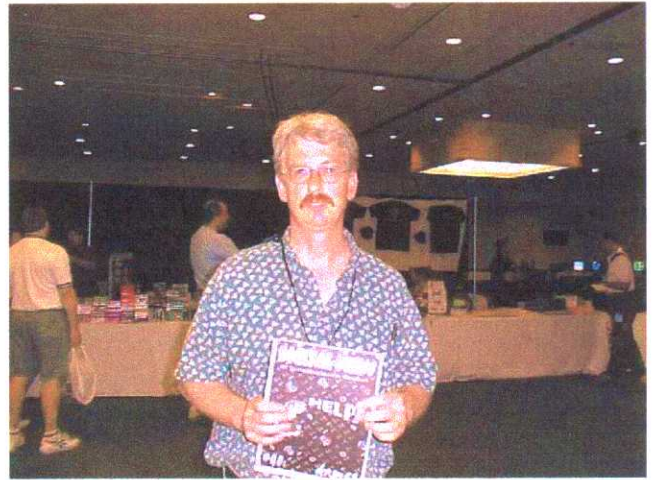


*Clint Dyer tells a potential customer "if you touch that game I'm going to go Pulp Fiction on your ass". I need not detail what happened after this snapshot.*





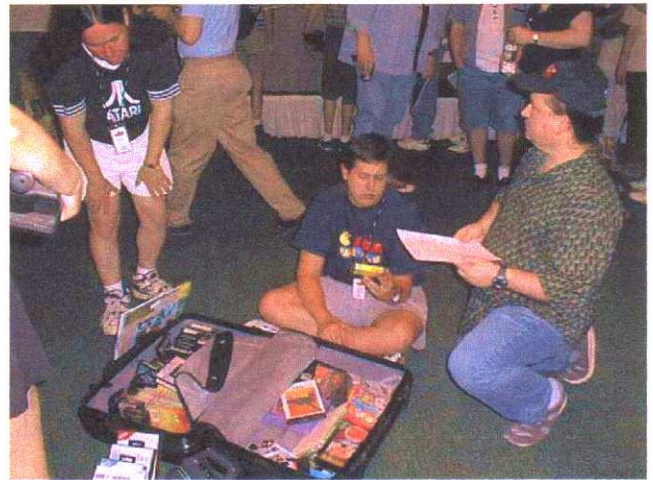
*Elsewhere, Sean Kelly plans a sneak attack on Howard Scott Warshaw's booth, just over the wall. The tear gas worked and no one was the wiser.*



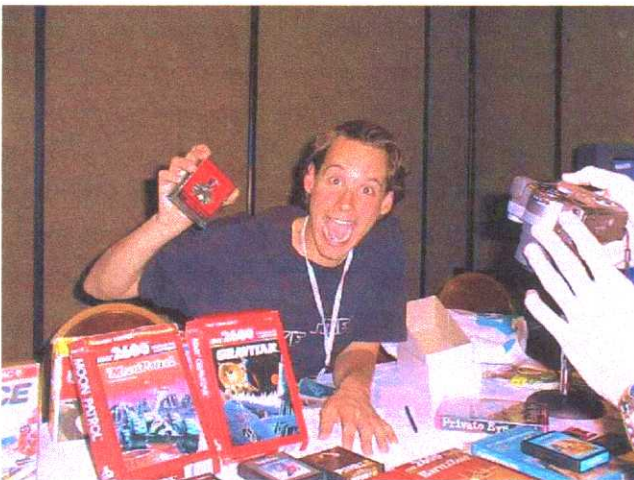
*Imagic game designer David "Quick Step" Johnson asks for something to wipe his ass with and is handed this copy of DP by hotel management.*



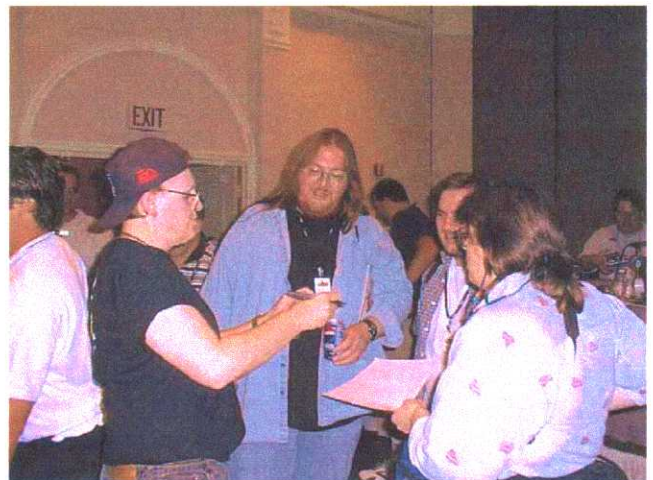
*The Blue Sky Rangers (brilliant Intellivision game designers) check to make sure they're in the right place.*



*Clint plays the old "this ain't worth much" scam with potential dupe Mike Mize. Did it work? Clint was seen driving a Ferrari the following week.*

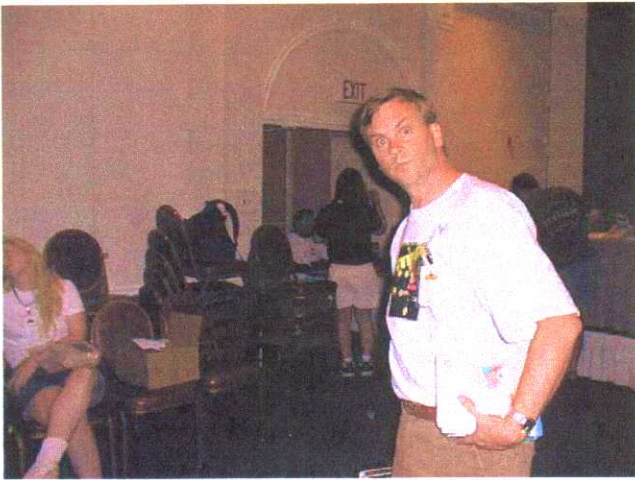


*Roloff de Jeu proudly displays his latest collectible but is really smiling because he is wearing no pants.*



*Bill Kunkel (left) and his wife teach the Tips & Tricks guys how to find the dot in Adventure. Then he shows them the actual "dot" that inspired Warren Robinett.*





*Jeff Cooper caught walking away with someone else's stuff: like a deer in the headlights, eh?*



*There just wasn't enough alcohol around for CGE'99 organizer John Hardie. When he started drinking the tile cleaner we took him out for coffee.*



*Life-size cardboard standups of Kelly, Cooper, Dyer, Hardie, Santulli, Iida, and Backiel, nearly the full Digital Press staff were made especially for the show.*



*A much larger group of collectors re-think the original idea of hiding the dead stripper under the floorboards when a cameraperson catches them by surprise.*



*Bright lights, big city. Really big cockroaches.*



*Digital Press performed live onstage at the Fremont Street Experience, just moments before this picture of Men at Work doing the same. Many had already fled.*





*Just as someone was telling me they thought Howard Jones was too old to be doing his 80's routine, he jumped and threw out his hip.*



*I was told there was a WHITE Castle on Fremont Street. Imagine my disappointment when it turned out to be just another trick to get me to gamble.*



*If there IS a heaven, it's probably a lot like this. Imagine "old" Las Vegas covered by a high-tech computer light show. And there is liquor at every corner.*



*John Hardie tries to sell another Berenstain Bears game to the attendees but receives a cold silence. Finally he introduces Atari legend Joe DeCuir.*

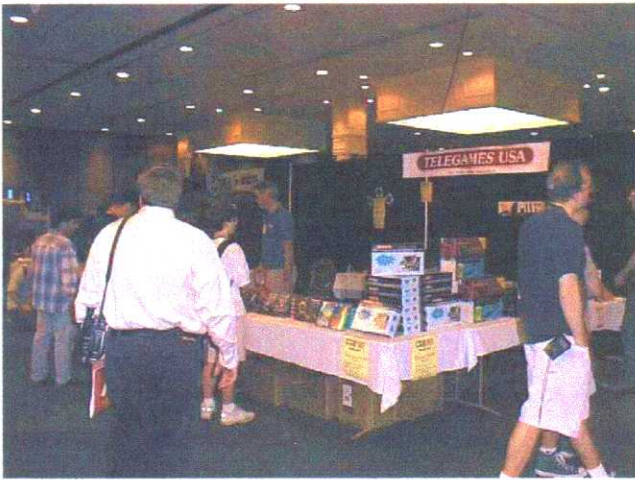


*Oops, this picture got slipped in by accident – I was "casing" the Intellivision booth for the best possible theft plan of their original Intellivision keyboard.*



*Onlookers seem disaffected as Keita Iida weaves a tale of treachery, murder, and deceit. "Bring on the Activision guys", someone shouted from the back.*





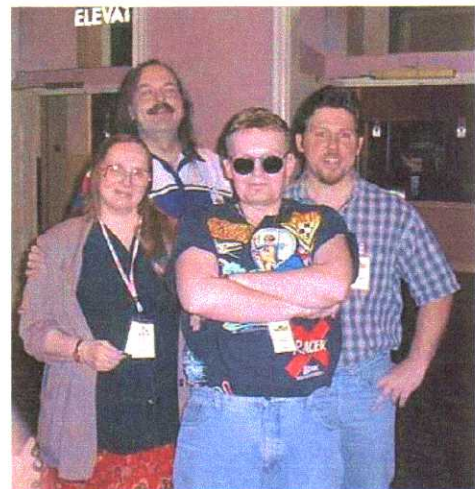
Many "exclusive" items were available at the show: Game Boy Yar's Revenge, new Atari 2600 games Pesco and Merlin's Walls, and Joe Santulli's inflatable girl.



I took this picture of my record-breaking GORF high score, but Twin Galaxies would not accept this photo as proof. Apparently, I was too far away from the screen.



You could play all kinds of games for free at the show. I collected a satchel full of quarters before anyone caught on, though.



Wortey, Katz, Kunkel, Santulli. The four names you always think of when you think of legendary video game journalists.



Once upon Atari, you could pull on Rob Fulop's ear and he would sing the Defender theme. Times have changed, and Fulop later retaliated with a match-winning pile driver.



The Cyberpunks guys are more "cyber" than "punk", their Stella CD and videos are fabulous products. Joe DeCuir attracted customers with his fabled "Latvian Chair Dance".





*"...and in this corner, wearing the black shorts with the white trim.... KATZ... KUNKEL.... and WORLEY! LLLLLlet's get ready to RUM-BULLLLLLLLLLLLLLL!"*



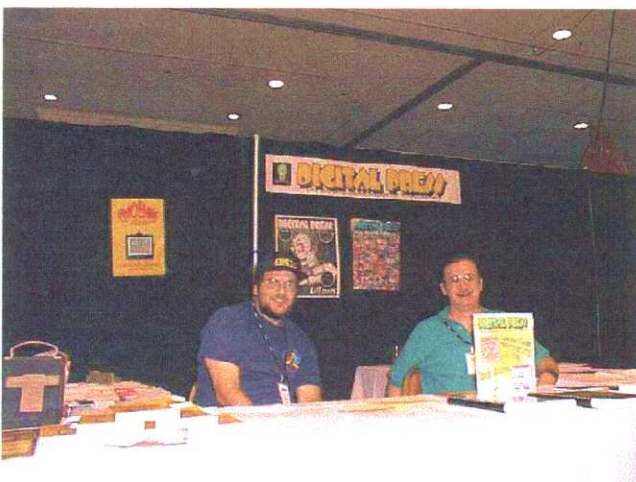
*Lots of brotherly affection as games from around the world get together – Netherlands' Roloff de Jeu, Marco Kerstens, and .... hey, where is Kevin Gifford's right hand?*



*Well known collector Steve Bender joins Jeff Cooper in a rousing Broadway-quality routine that truly brought the house down. Later they swapped Avalon Hill games.*



*Santulli and gaming legend Ralph Baer just moments before the pandemonium broke out after Santulli mouthed off some comment about Baer's "little brown box".*



*Digital Press shared a booth with Leonard "Phoenix" Herman. Leonard's laughing now, but later he'll discover that his wallet is missing.*



*We watched from afar as the CGE guys dumped loads of games on the floor for 50 cents each. Two were killed, thirteen seriously injured.*



# Ralph Baer and Coleco

## How Baer Saved the Company in 1976 by Keita Iida

During the Summer of 1997, I was fortunate to be one of several gaming "historians" who were invited to Ralph Baer's New Hampshire home and spend the weekend talking about his involvement in the videogame industry. Sure, most well-schooled classic gaming fans know that Baer developed the first home TV game system in 1972, the Magnavox Odyssey, and some others are aware that he also was the man behind the Coleco Telstar Arcade, Milton Bradley's Simon and the Coleco Kid Vid Module for the Atari 2600. However, his pedigree goes way beyond that. Did you know that Ralph Baer basically saved Coleco from extinction way back in 1967? Here's the story as we flash back to 1976...

Baer got word early about the development of a video game chip being developed by two engineers at General Instruments' labs in Scotland. Meanwhile, he had previously met Arnold Greenberg, Coleco's president, at Marvin Glass & Associates in Chicago - the pre-eminent toy & game designers in the US at that time. Greenberg met Baer at GI's Hicksville, NY plant where the AY3-8500 single-chip, multi-game device was demonstrated to Baer by Ed Sachs, who ran the plant and later moved GI's IC manufacturing to Phoenix, Arizona (it's now Microcircuits). Thus, Coleco became GI's first and preferred customer for the AY3-8500, a chip around which millions of off-shore (HK, Taiwan, etc) games were built (on all of which Sanders/Magnavox collected royalties, by the way). Thus was born Telstar.

One late Tuesday afternoon in 1976, Baer received a call in his lab at Sanders from Arnold Greenberg. At the same time, his brother and CEO Leonard is on the phone with Dan Chisholm, one of Sanders' VP's. What did they call about? Well, Coleco personnel had been at the FCC radio-frequency-interference compliance testing labs in Maryland and flunked the RFI tests...too much radiation at harmonics (multiples) of the Channel 3 or 4 signals which video games use to get into a TV set via its antenna terminals. Coleco failed to qualify under Rules 15 of the FCC...and they were told to come back on Friday that week or they would have to get to the back of the line! Since Coleco had some 30 million dollar's worth of inventory sitting in the warehouse ready for distribution, there was a minor panic in Connecticut!

Fortunately for Coleco, Arnold Greenberg remembered Ralph Baer, and even more fortuitously, Baer had an RFI test lab under his control at Sanders at that time as part of his Equipment Design Division. Coleco was informed that if they would sign Magnavox' Licensing Agreement (which they hadn't done at that point in time), Baer would be glad to help them. They showed up on Wednesday morning with an executed copy of the Agreement and Baer's crew went to work on a Telstar console to get its RFI within FCC spec limits. Tests took place on the roof of Sanders

Canal Street building; they tried various true-and-true methods to suppress the excess radiation, all to no avail....you might say they didn't do too well that day.

Early Thursday morning, Baer was in the lab on the partial floor adjacent to the roof test area. No one else had showed up yet to begin the RFI-reduction job. As Baer wandered through the large lab, he saw two pieces of electronic equipment sitting on a test bench that were connected together with some common coax cable. What attracted his attention was the presence of a couple of small ferrite toroids (powdered iron rings) through which the cable had been looped, one or two turns. On a hunch, Baer proceeded to ask around among the few engineers present at the early hour just what those rings were for. Lo and behold, somebody actually knew the answer. It turned out that during operation of those two electronic boxes, the coax had picked up stray signals from some nearby radio transmitter which had screwed up the performance of the boxes. So someone had the bright idea of suppressing the surface wave created by that radiation with some chokes... and that's what the ferrite rings were! At that moment, a lightbulb went on in Baer's head: He ran around the labs opening storage cabinet doors and generally poking around until he found some ferrite toroids. When the RFI crew arrived on the roof for further Telstar tests, Baer slipped one of these toroids on the shielded coax cable on Telstar and took two turns (loops) through the ring.....BINGO! The unit passed the spurious radiation tests. Baer's group sent the Coleco crew back to Maryland, Telstar passed the FCC tests and everybody breathed a sigh of relief.

As a result of this episode, Coleco further relied on Sanders to help with the development of next year's video games. Baer assembled a small group of engineers and technicians and had one of his department managers head it up (an anomaly in a high-tech, defense electronics firm if ever there was one). They developed Coleco's triangular Telstar Arcade game and a Combat game. Sanders did the work, Coleco paid their bills and sold a lot of games. If anybody doubts that story, Ralph Baer has TONS of documents in his collection. According to Baer, every time he looks at them, he breaks out in a big smile. He always wanted to get into the video game business; however, there was no way Sanders would enter into it, especially because the Odyssey was not a runaway best seller... so he did it subliminally by doing Coleco's development work at Sanders.

Next time you break out your ColecoVision or Cabbage Patch doll in admiration, remember who was responsible for saving the company! If not for his heroics in 1976, gaming in the 1980's may have taken on a completely different form.



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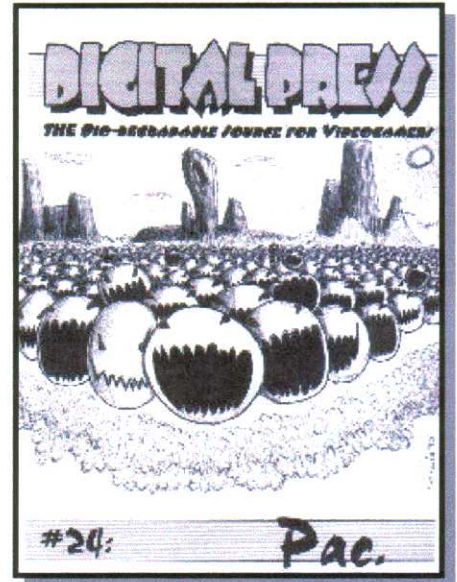
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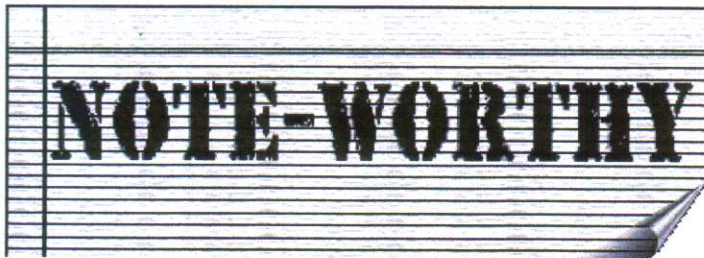
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#### **JOE DECUIR**

Since playing a key role in the development of the Atari 2600, Atari 400/800 and the Amiga Computer, he has worked in PC communications, at Everex and Microsoft. He edited a number of national and international communications standards, particularly for how a PC talks to data, fax and voice modems. He was also instrumental in attaining widespread adoption of the Universal Serial Bus (USB) standard on PC's. He now works as a technical evangelist for Windows Networking at Microsoft.

#### **RICK DYER**

Aside from being the first person to introduce real animation to gaming with the classic coin-op Dragon's Lair (animated by Don Bluth), he also created Sega's coin-op hologram-based game, Time Traveler.

#### **JAY FENTON**

The man behind Gorf and the Bally Astrocade is also credited with creating Macromedia Director, a popular video editing program for the PC and Macintosh computers.

#### **TOD FRYE**

Currently at 3DO, where he and fellow Atari alum Rob Zdybel

worked on Battletanx for the Nintendo 64.

#### **ROB FULOP**

For Hasbro, America's largest toy company, from 1986-1988, Fulop engineered the design and production of two feature length interactive movies. Both of these titles, were later released on multiple platforms by such publishers as Sega and Digital Pictures, and were DP's two best selling CD-ROM titles. What were they? Sewer Shark and Night Trap.

#### **JERRY LAWSON**

"Mr. Channel F" also founded Videosoft, the company that sold Color Bar Generator for the Atari 2600.

#### **JAY SMITH**

The mastermind who brought Vectrex to life also created the handheld Microvision system. He is founder and CEO of Adrenalin Entertainment, and is developing games for leading console and computer platforms -- including the VM Labs-developed, Nuon-enhanced DVD players (yay!)

#### **RALPH BAER**

While he was Division Manager Chief Engineer for Equipment Design at Sanders Associates Inc, a New Hampshire-based company which today is a division of Lockheed, he began development on a "Brown Box" prototype in 1966. His creation eventually become the Magnavox Odyssey -- the first ever home videogame -- in 1972. In addition to Odyssey, Baer was the creative force behind the Coleco Telstar Arcade system, Milton Bradley's Simon, Coleco Gemini game console and the Coleco Kid Vid peripheral for the Atari 2600. As an engineer, his achievements are unparalleled with over 150 patents worldwide in his name.



Digital Press is dedicated to the memory of my best friend  
and DP co-creator, Kevin Oleniacz.  
Kevin's spirit will be with us through every homing missile fired, knockout punch delivered, UFO destroyed, and finish line crossed.

Play recklessly. Think positively. Live EVERY moment to the fullest.