DIGITAL PRESS

THE Bio-degradable Source for Videogamers

TRUST ME, IT JUST WOULDN'T WORK OUT...,

DAVEG·02

$2.00
Issue
49

neutered.

Neutered.
Editor's BLURB by Joe Santulli

So here we are, sittin' pretty just one issue away from a real milestone. 50 issues! But here's a bit of trivia for you. THIS is really the 50th issue. That's right, if you've been here since the early 90's you may remember the "Write Digital Press" issue where we asked our readers to submit their own columns and reviews and the rest of us lazy asses just sat back and took a break. Ahh, I need to re-institute that idea again, though as you can see from the frequency of these issues, I pretty much "take a break" 10 months out of the year. About that...

I realize that DP has become much less than a bi-monthly 'zine over the past 2-3 years and I finally know why that is. It was about that time when the DP website started getting popular, the forums started getting busy, and there were more opportunities to reach a wide audience with our "expertise". So I've been hammering away at that, and if you haven't seen it recently it's really quite lovely, lively, and BIG... at least with regard to content. So here's what I've done to make BOTH the paper issues and website work at full capacity. I promoted one of our staff. From this issue forward (or at least for as long as he's willing to do it), Dave Giarrusso will be Editor-in-Chief on the paper issues. I've known Dave for years and he's been a valuable contributor not only to Digital Press projects but to the gaming community in general. He's also got a much better eye for aesthetics than I do, and I think you'll see the 'zine change in appearance - for the better - over time as he familiarizes himself with the content. Please join me in welcoming Dave to the executive washroom, where cigars are commonplace and there's nary a drop of anything on the floors!

A lot has happened since our last issue. We've released a new edition of the Collector's Guide (which can even be found on Amazon.com), we've produced a music CD by DJ Tony Fox NYC (look for details at the website), a "spokesmodel" has come and gone (see back page), and we've brought in another writer, Monique Trulson, who has actually been with us since the early part of the year and who we finally get to introduce here in issue #49. Whew! So as inactive as things may seem if you're a paper-only customer, we've been rather busy. Fortunately, you'll get to see more paper, more frequently, from here on out.

That's enough of my rambling for now. Enjoy this issue, whose theme is "not male or female". Yep, we've lost our marbles. Enjoy the madness!

ON THE COVER
Didn't Mean to Burst Your Bubble
by Dave Giarrusso

Normally, when you picture someone at a bar by the name of "Bubbles," you'd be thinking of our friend on the right. Of course, we're anything BUT normal. In this case, you probably already recognized our friend on the left from the Williams coin-op of the same name. At least "he" didn't lead the poor girl on...

USA 37c

READER RETALIATION

Finders Keepers

Hey DP,
I picked up this game with a box of 2600 carts and was wandering what system its for. I've included some pics. Thanks for any help.
    Brian

Hey yourself, Brian! What you've got there is the Atari 8-bit computer version of Frogger. They're not hard to dig up, but it IS a hoppin' good translation of the arcade game. HOPfully you've got a machine to play it on!

Losers Weepers

Dear Sir or Other,
    In lew of your recent naming of the "sexiest girl gamer on this tiny planet" I find that I do not recall having a chance to cast my vote in this groundbreaking decision. I feel that everyone should have had a right to speak their voice, because when it comes down to it all we have are our voices, and guns, thumbs, whatever else humans have that stupid animals don't.
    And I sir (or other) did *not* get a chance to vote.
    We do not live in Nazi Germany do we? Was I denied my very rights as a human being? Well here's news for you Adolph, you may as well have thrown me the soap-on-a-rope and pointed me towards the gas chamber. You very well may as well have!
    How many "sexy girl gamers" did you go through before making the decision?
    How many people were on the voting staff? Does this Ariel Ambersomething character even know her games front and back? Or did you dig some poor girl out of a gutter and cover her body in game systems you *sick* monkeys. You did didn't you? Sick monkeys! The lot of you! Shame... Shame on you, what would Jesus think?
    I would very much like to hold an interview with this Ariel Ambersomething character and quiz her on her game knowledge. I *scoffs* have a strong feeling she may fall short of a "perfect score." *scoff*
    Perhaps you should have looked for an applicant with the credentials to hold the title of "sexiest girl gamer on this tiny planet." Someone with Megaman tattoos as opposed to fluttery "non-gaming" butterflies. Someone who Can wield a light gun with the best of em'.
    I strongly feel that you brushed right over a one miss Dev/null (http://www.cipater.net) who would actually be *worthy* of such a title.
    You people. I hope you CRY yourselves to sleep over the terrible crimes you have committed against humanity.
     I don't know much, but I do know a few things.
    A.) I did NOT vote for Adolph Hitler
    B.) I did NOT vote for Amber Arielsomething
    Coincidence? I think not....
    Best regards
~Asmoron

You certainly have a lot to say on this subject, Asmoron. I really only have one question for you.
    Are you registered to vote? In the good ol' US of A, you need to register before you can vote. My guess is that you're not registered. You're not from Florida by any chance, are you?
    Oh, and be on the lookout for next year's "sexiest girl gamer." If you're a registered voter, you'll get the postcard in the mail. What? You're STILL not a registered voter? Well, then. Pfft!

Controller Seekers

Subject: R U Interested? Or know of any one? This is sort of a question, but sort of a offer. I like in B.C., Canada.
    I would like to start off by saying you have a very user friendly site. And the resources are second 2 none. I my self am a huge game fan. Love the pics of your stock piles.
    I have a Coleco with the Atari Adaptor, actualy we still use it on the

odd special occasion. We also have the NES, and all other N systems. We still use the systems, but the control sticks have always been a problem, is there a place to buy new? how about refurbising? If I could I would defenitly get it all up-and running again.
    We (my self and my cousins in Princeton) own identical Colecos but we share a Atari Adapter. Do you know where I may find a second one? E-bay is hopeless for this item.
     Also I have a 2-3 games that MAY not be on your site. How do I extract info from the Cartrage? I'd gladdly send the files to you. This is the best offer I have. I'd never part with my systems, I'm sure you know why.
    Any replies or references would be much appriciated,
    Hamish Haker, Chesel, Ron, Rick, Don, and Vickie

Greetings, Great White North gamers! When hunting online for used controllers, a good place to start is right on our very own DP messageboard! http://www.digitpress.com/forum, eh? We have a For Sale/Trade section where fellow gamers from around the globe ask for and offer plenty of games, consoles, controllers and adapters. Happy hunting!

Guess that does it for this issue! See you next time!

Got a gripe? Thinking of thanking us? Cooking up a question? Send all your screamin' e-mails to us at digitalpress@email.com. If we respond to your letter in a fantastic future issue, you'll be able to brag to all your friends and family!

Solution to Super Skateboardin'

What to do for my next column? Decisions, decisions? Then I realized that I hadn't done a game solution or a map in quite some time. OK, what game? According to my research, most had already been done by others, or yours truly. Here is one game that seems to have been missed. It is a decent game with good graphics, but it has one thing that must have caused a lot of frustration. I am talking about the difficulty getting back on the skateboard. The trick is that you must have enough running room in the direction you want to go. You must first pick up the board by walking to the middle of it. Then run with it and fire to drop and jump on it. Just be sure to allow yourself enough room. If it is too crowded, use another room. It takes some patience to master this feat. I still have trouble sometimes. Any time you hit a wall, you will fall off your board. The object of Super Skateboardin' is to shut off all electricity within 15 minutes after closing time (5PM).

The detail map shows where to find all the sources of electricity that must be shut off. Each light must be shut off by jumping up. The rest of the appliances and machinery are shut on or off by passing their switch boxes. The number rows represent all the floors from the lowest basement level up to the roof. The letter columns are used to mark off the rooms. All of the tube entrances have been numbered according to the best sequence that I have come up with to solve this maze. Please note that a lot of times you should finish working on a floor you just reached before continuing up or down.

This map may look like a plate of spaghetti, but it can be broken down in easy to perform sections by using the pause button. For instance just remember for the beginning: across-down-down-up-across. Then hit PAUSE. You will now be in a position to go into the #4 tube entrance in room E3, bought some time to check the map, and plan your next few moves. You also have to remember to shut off all possible electrical devices along the way. I will leave the rest of the breakpoints up to the reader. There is enough time, even with map lookups or retracing your steps, to complete this game. Just keep an eye on the decreasing power usage meter on the left as you shut things off. When you

Al prepares for a little Super Skateboardin' by getting a nice running start and diving on the skateboard. Whee! Then he plugs in the game and turns on his 7800.

have everything off, it will flash EXIT. Make a beeline for the front door, but be careful not to turn anything back on. The game is beaten when you get the flashing YOU WIN! message. The game still has replay value because you can strive for a faster time.

If you are by room E9 and you have just shut off the coffee pot (last item) and you still don't get a flashing EXIT, you have missed something along the way. You still might have time left

to backtrack up or down. You can see 3 floors simultaneously. Look for something still on. If you find it, pause and plan an access route by using the map.

TIPS

1) To get a good start, pick up the board, but jump on in the first room.
2) A lot of times you may have set something back on as you entered a tube. When it is close to an entrance, you may have to turn it back on so that when you exit it will be shut back off.
3) To bypass a tube entrance you have to be standing up on your board.
4) To enter a tube entrance, you have to be in a crouch on your board.
5) Try to shut off all lights by jumping non-stop. Once they're off, they stay off.
6) To avoid turning anything back on, jump up over the logical switch location.
7) Be careful on the roof, you can fall to your doom if you go too far.

BUG

It is possible for your skateboard to get stuck in a doorway. This happens when it is sticking out exactly halfway between adjacent rooms. Every time you try to pick it up or move it, it won't work because it gets stuck between the room/screen changes. There is no way out of this, you may as well hit reset. Once you've experienced this, it becomes second nature to avoid.

SUPER SKATEBOARDIN' (7800)

A   B   C   D   E   F

Roof

27

22   P   26

21   29   28   L L L   CM

20   19   25

19   30

18   C   24   20

17   32   31   L L L

16   21   23

15   CM   33

14   C   22   L L L

13   P   39   34   35   16   C   18

     L L L

12   L L L   38   36

11   40   L L L   P

10   L L L   37   C   P

                        C

9   42   41   L L L

   L L L   MP   AL   P

8   17

7   F   L L L   CM
Front   1

6   L L L   2   L L L   7   11

5   L L L   9   12   6   S

4   S   8   10   S

3   14   4   L L L

2   S   L L L   S

   3   5   13   15

1   L L L   AL   L L L
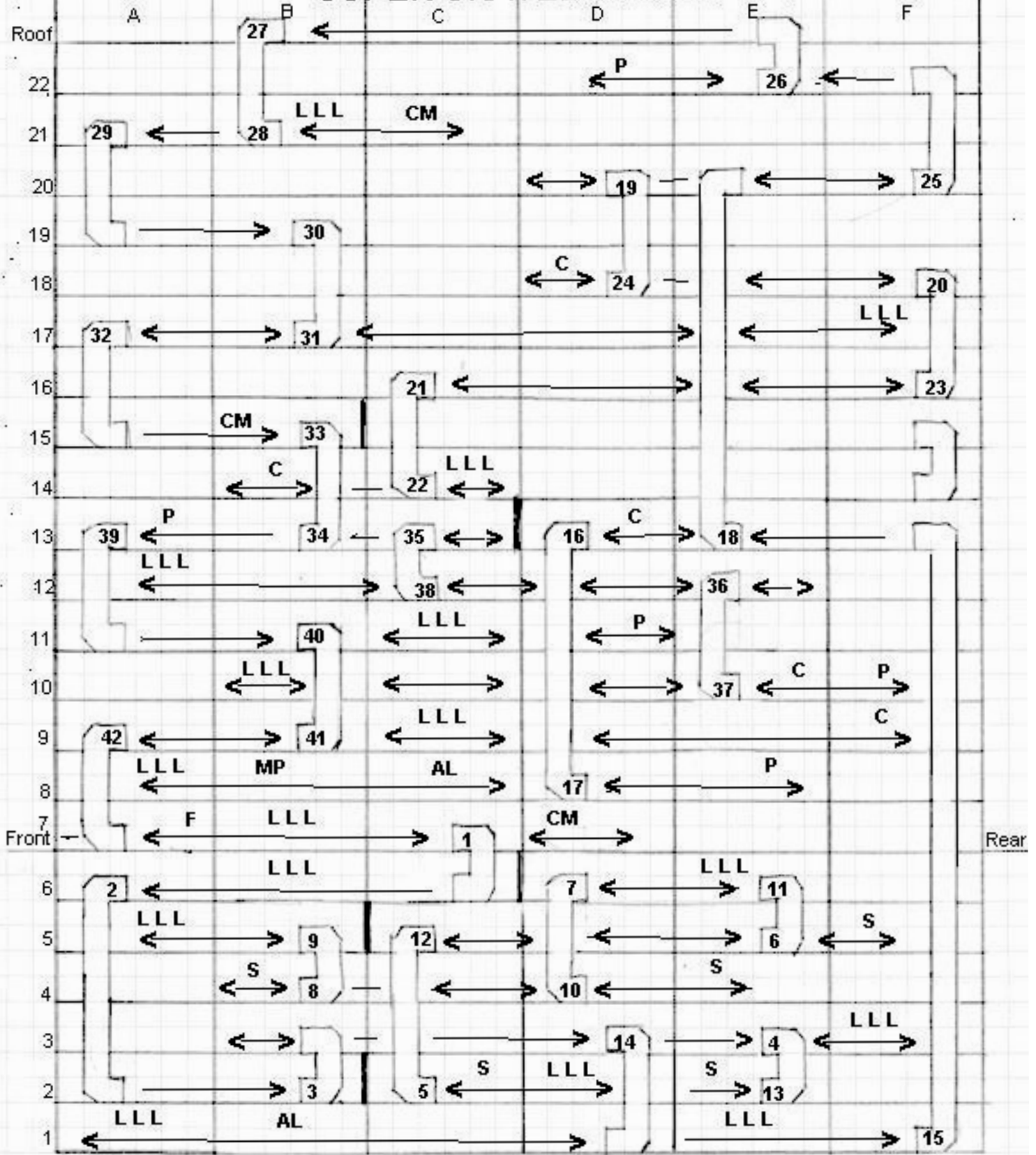
LEGEND:

AL = assembly line	LLL = lights
C = computer	MP = movie projector
CM = coffee maker	P = printer
F = fountain	S = saw

Rear

ON THE PROWL

with Ian Baronofsky

Don't Fear the Neuter

Who are these people? You know, the ones who are always paying more, sniping your auctions, getting to the flea markets before you? Hanging out at the thrifts all day? Those nameless, sexless (mostly male, granted), hopelessly annoying people that are pathetic enough to get to the good stuff before me- or after me. Do they have no morals? Didn't they realize that game was meant for me? Who are they, and why do I care?

I'm not sure if this column fits into the Neuter issue because the people that you are competing against are neuters, of unknown species or sex or locale ('Sumguy',) or if I want to neuter them after they out compete me for the goods.

In collecting, you'll run into these faceless, nameless (well, they may have a user id) neuters around every corner, unless you live in Maine like my friend Willie. Willie is the only video game collector in all the state of Maine. In fact, Willie may well be the only person in Maine. (If you are from Maine, write to Digital Press and prove me wrong.) For the rest of us living in places less similar to Canada, we encounter the neuteral competition in every venue.

Since I've been doing this for a long time, I know most of the collectors who are my competition on the internet. And I like most of the collectors that I know. It makes it a lot less painful when I lose an auction to a friend, than when I lose an auction to a mysterious new user with a feedback level hovering around nil. Although I know many of them from the Internet in general, there are many I've met through eBay. Most of the people I've gotten in contact with through eBay seem happy that someone went through the trouble of contacting them. A lot of them aren't even in the classic video game circuit as we know it. Some of them even have a few spare things to trade, occasionally something cool. Although it's uncommon for competing bidders to write to each other, most of us

Ian puts on patented "On the Prowl Disguise" #44F3: "Wacky Door to Door Flobee Salesman." Sure, you might chuckle at his tactics, but Ian swiped that Romscanner while the kids were getting their new Flobeetastic hairdos in the kitchen. Who's laughing now, Mr. "I Never Find Anything in the Wild"?

are pleasantly surprised, as long as the note is of goodwill ("we come in peace and will not outbid you.") eBay can be such a vicious, anonymous site, that any human contact makes it a bit less carnivorous, and a bit more pleasant.

There are a number of people that I write to every time I stumble upon an auction they are bidding on. Sometimes, with some of my more trusted and better friends, we'll even talk about bids. Why bid your friends auctions up without making sure that your bid will be higher? It's just wasting each other's money. (Perhaps this merits an extensive discussion of eBay mechanics in a future column.) Of course, this is a major leap, as you have to trust each other not to use that information against each other.

And you can't change your mind about bids without contacting your friend in time. In other words, it forces you to value friends more than auctions, which is no stretch for me. And in the end, it makes eBay a less bitter experience, because I don't feel so bad losing to a friend.

Unfortunately, most of the people you meet 'in the wild' aren't your friends. I've been hunting for old video games for some time, and I've had many competitive moments with the enemy. The wild eyed looks we get from our nemesis when we run into them hunting through a pile of tapes at a thrift store or walking the aisles of a flea market are sheer paranoia. One encouraging thought is that everyone has their limits, and not everyone sees and buys the same stuff. Most of the perceived threat is from hunters less educated

about old games, and less open minded about keeping valueless ones. If you read Digital Press, and you like to hunt for goodies, you're more likely to spot a peculiar system or cartridge than the average profiteer or junk collector. Having more knowledge always makes you better equipped to outcompete the Sumguys and eBay sellers who are trying to make a quick buck. And frankly, many of the items I cherish most in my collection have the least perceived value.

I have run into other video game buyers at markets and thrift stores that became my friends, although my first response was always deflation. I'm plodding along, minding my own business, looking for scores, and then suddenly, I'm forced to acknowledge that I'm not alone at this flea market. A mysterious force has already consumed my power pills, and left me with ghosts. Basically the feeling is the opposite of finding a Vectrex- especially when they have an armful of goodies. I find that the best way to curtail the brief depression that follows the realization that your territory isn't virgin territory is to talk to the person. Sometimes you'll make a connection for trades, purchases, or just gaming. I remember a story in Indiana where a collector was buying a few old video games, and

Friend, or foe? Or, is it that faceless nemesis... Sumguy?

a guy came up to him and asked him if he was interested in more old games. In the end, the collector came away with over 400 boxed games, many really sweet titles to make even the most seasoned veteran jealous, for about $200. All from a chance meeting in a thrift store. One of my closer video gaming buddies was someone I met at the now gone South Van Ness flea market in San Francisco ('Roagie.') I ended up running into him at the Bay Area collectors meeting later that year. 5 years later, we live in the same town again, and now

I have a buddy to hunt and game with. Really, it was a combination of chance meetings and the internet, but certainly I turned the nemesis neuter into a buddy to share the gaming with.

Then again, I remember running into a major collector at a thrift store in Chicago, when I was maybe 2 years into collecting. He was sorting through a tangle of cords to liberate a Colecovision Roller Controller. I badly needed and wanted a Roller Controller at that time. The price couldn't have been more than $3. After speaking with him for a little while, he mentioned that I might be able to trade the thing off of him, although he already had a few spares. He bought it and left. I ran into him at several regional collectors meetings, and he still had that spare Roller Controller for years to come. In retrospect, I find that unforgivable. In the same position, I would unquestionably hand over the item to the needy collector, especially given that I already had a spare.

A key point to remember when confronting neuters in the classic collecting hobby is that you are also the neuter to them. There's no need to tell them outright that you have 500 Atari 2600 cartridges, that some are worth big money, and that the Music Machine cartridge they're carrying up to the register is worth $200. They'll freak out. Take it easy. Take it slow. A little knowledge can be dangerous, and introducing people to the hobby can rapidly induce greedy thoughts without a dose of realism. I'm not advocating scamming people, but if you immediately make someone know that they are ignorant, they will immediately respond by proving you

wrong. I recommend that all talk of numbers with neuters be withheld until the conversation is between friends. Figure out where your neuter stands, as

Ah, the beloved Vectrex. They're out there somewhere. Now go get one before Sumguy beats you to it!

if you are talking to a complete ignoramus, or a Salvation Army regional manager, you may have just prevented anyone from ever finding another game in your county or someone else's.

Some people are far too paranoid to even advance past an angry glare. Or a cursory or unreturned email. It probably isn't your fault. Some folks just can't handle the concept of sharing. And many people just can't get past the initial feelings of anxiety. But don't let that stop you- there are always gamers happy to connect with their kind. You're bound to run into them sometime. Some will even become your friends. The others will always be neuters, probably without anyone to share video games with. And that just isn't as much fun, is it?

Psst! Hey, buddy. You need a Roller Controller? I've got six extras. This one's for you, no charge. Because everyone needs to play Slither.

Be here next issue, when Ian ponders: to Ebay, or not to Ebay. That is the question...

And Ian's got the answers. See you then!

RANDOM REVIEWS

BUBBLES

Williams
Arcade
1982

Dave Giarrusso spins outta control and down the drain during this review...

Element	Dave	Joe	Larry
Graphics	7	7	6
Sound	7	6	5
Gameplay	8	8	8
OVERALL	8	8	7

Features:

- Variable skill levels
- Nasty cockroaches!
- Also available for PSX

Believe it or not, when I was a kid, I was introduced to exactly three different "Bubbles" at a local Chuck E. Cheese. The first was a chimp, aptly named Bubbles because she (so I'm told) once grabbed a bottle of children's bubbles (with free wand!) and drank the entire thing. Then she hiccuped bubbles for thirty minutes. Later, she vomited almost silently under the cover of night. Still later, her owner found a nice present on the living room carpet, which, upon closer inspection, contained the wand. I'm not sure if she's the same Bubbles who later hung out with Michael Jackson and subsequently turned up in Sega's pair of **Moonwalker** video games. The second "Bubbles" I met was an appropriately named female "entertainer" with some seriously big, beautiful bubbles of her own. The final, and my personal favorite of the three (I was a kid, remember?) was a little blue coin-op by Williams.

Some gamers might have you believe that **Bubbles** is a less than stellar William's coin-op. As evidence to support their claim, they'd offer up Bubbles' absence from the SNES and Genesis versions of the original WAGH compilation. They'd try to convince you that it's just a game where you clean

Welcome to the land of Bubbles! (Actually, it's just a filthy sink.)

GAH! Bugs! Just like in real life. If you don't have a broom, you'd better run, coward.

out a sink.

I, on the other hand, would say that Bubbles is awesome. 'Cause it's awesome.

There's much more to Bubbles than first meets the eye, and it easily holds its own right along side juggernauts like **Robotron**, **Sinistar** and **Joust**. Have you ever seen a soap bubble floating through the air? You must have, whether it was as a kid, blowing bubbles through a wand with one of those fifty-cent plastic bottles o' suds, or last week as you squirted dish soap into the sink. What didja think as you watched the bubbles soar majestically through the air? I'd guess it was something like, "well, there goes a bubble. Neat. Now, what's for dinner..." It's a bubble, big deal, right? The thing is, on closer inspection, a soap bubble is a beautiful thing, really. It's spherical, it's almost invisible, and yet, it contains every color of the rainbow, swirling and twirling across its surface.

Like its namesake, the Bubbles coin-op is equally beautiful. If you've never given it a chance, it might be time to take a closer look. True, the object of Bubbles is to clean out sinks while avoiding a slew of items guaranteed to burst your bubble, but the beauty of the game lies in its insidious

attention to detail. Not one pixel, not one sound effect is wasted. Everything in Bubbles is there for a reason, and the whole package is a superb example of brilliant game design.

Clean up the crumbs, ants and grease stains, dodge the brushes, sponges, razor blades and cockroaches, and move on the next round. As the bubble cleans up dirt, it grows. The larger it gets, the more cumbersome it is to effectively wrangle around the sink, but a larger bubble also scores MUCH higher than a small bubble upon completion of a round. The bubble develops a face as it grows, first a pair of eyes, then a mouth, and finally, a million-dollar smile. Better still, the facial features are a key

If you can clean up the crud touching the drain, you'll collect 2x the point value.

facet of the gameplay, and are the key to your success in racking up big points.

A bubble equipped with eyes can pick up a broom from the oft-visiting cleaning lady, and use it to wipe out the otherwise deadly cockroaches. The drain is deadly to a bubble without a mouth, but safe for a bubble with a mouth. Once the bubble has a mouth, it can also slam the brushes and sponges around the sink, and if you're on the money, right down the drain for more bonus points. Playing bumper cars with the enemies has its price though: each hit knocks the

**Atari
5200
1984**

Russ Perry Jr. boxes us in until he meets the threshold

Element	Russ	Dave	Joe
Graphics	5	4	4
Sound	6	6	5
Gameplay	8	9	7
OVERALL	7	8	6

Features:

- Variable skill levels
- Chromium Electronic Marker!
- Stix & Sparx!

When I heard the theme of this issue was "Neutered", the first thing I did was ponder what that meant in terms of games. (Well, no, the first thing I did was speculate that the proper title for the issue should be "Neuter", as in 'having no gender' as opposed to 'having gender removed'). A lot of suggestions were for games starring the standard spaceships, which isn't quite what the theme is looking for in my mind, and robots which is closer, but given human sensibilities are often anthropomorphized with gender anyway.

On the other hand, **Qix** is one of those games where you're never really sure what you're supposed to be, so you're pretty sure it doesn't have gender. Oh, the instructions refer to the Qix as "he", but refers to you as using a "chromium electronic marker" -- no gender there (though the pencil-looking thing on the cover may intimate a Freudian suggestion as to gender after all :-).

What it really comes down to is that Qix is an abstract game, something you won't see as much of in the modern age of gaming as you did in the days of simpler graphics. Of course, Qix's graphics are startlingly sparse, and unfortunately a bit boring. It would take years before the game was reinvented with pretty pictures in the background to uncover as you play, in games like **Gal's Panic** and **Ultimate Qix**.
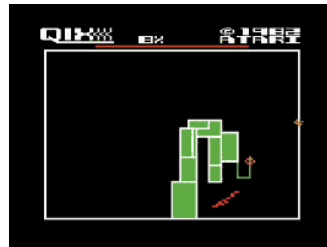
On the other hand, the Qix itself, merely a collection of lines traipsing about the screen chaotically, yet hypnotically, is a very powerful draw

[ugh, no pun intended, swear to God] graphically. It's not enough to keep the game from being labeled as bland, but it's a little "something special" that keeps this game from sinking lower in the ratings.

The 5200 version of Qix stays remarkably true to the original

Sound is just right for the times. It's a little sparse, but interesting enough. The Qix just sort of hums as it flits about, and in general it all sounds very "electric".

Of course, it's the play that matters, right? As I sit here, I can't decide whether I should write glowingly about the game, or temper my enthusiasm for it. I suspect it's a game that's aimed more at the logical, intellectual types than the twitch gamer. That's not to say that there aren't "twitch" moments where nerves of steel are required, but I don't think the average twitch gamer is going to see this game and decide that they HAVE to play it. But, to help you decide, here's a summary of the gameplay...
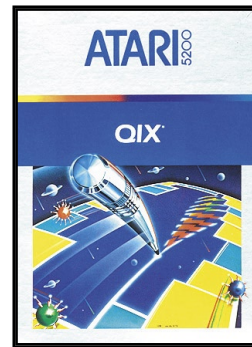
Basically, you're there to draw Stix to partition off bits of the main playfield. You can do this quickly, or slowly, depending on which fire button you press (although on the emulator I have you apparently move slowly by default even if no button is pressed, so be careful!). Drawing slowly means twice as many points, but entails more risk, because the whole time you

Box art for the 5200 version of Qix. What would Freud say?

are drawing you are vulnerable to the Qix. When you close off a box, you capture part of the playfield, which you get points for, and you are no longer vulnerable to the Qix. The box will fill in orange if you drew slowly, or blue if you drew quickly. There is a threshold, which starts at 50%, and when you've captured that much of the screen, you go to the next round.

Now, so far this doesn't sound too difficult, does it? Well, the second round features a more intelligent Qix that will actually track you a little bit, making your task a bit harder. The round after that you face two Qix, though both dumb, and you can choose to complete a secondary objective -- split them up -- rather than capture the screen threshold. The fourth round sees the two Qix become intelligent. After that, I'm not sure they continue to get MORE intelligent (the instructions don't say), but it's certainly possible.

Still doesn't sound that hard? This all assumes you're playing the novice level, which is not the full arcade experience (yes, this started as an arcade game, made by Taito). You see, there are also Sparx and the Fuse in the skilled level. Sparx are two little sparks that travel around the perimeter of the playfield, and running into them is fatal. The Fuse occurs when you stop drawing -- a little spark starts where you started drawing and follows the Stix until you finish drawing, or it catches and kills you. Oh, and on the skilled level, forget that easy 50% -- now you've got to

RANDOM REVIEWS

WORMS ARMAGEDDON

PSX/N64/DC/PC   MicroProse/Team 17   Strategy

Larry Anderson, outside in the rain, wriggling on the sidewalk

Element	Larry	Dave	E.W. Jim
Graphics	7	7	9
Sound	6	6	9
Gameplay	9	8	9
OVERALL	8	7	9

Features:

- Multi-player, same time
- Variable skill levels
- Twisted humor!

Anyone remember the PC game **Scorched Earth**? Back in the days before wild multi-player LAN games, this simple two-on-two game would have PC game geeks occupied for hours, even days at a time. The premise was simple: Take one pair of tanks, a little geometry and physics, a kick-ass gun, and shoot at each other until someone screams "Mommy!!"

The folks at Team17 have taken that philosophy (especially the crying Mommy part) and applied it to the venerable **Worms** franchise. For those of you who haven't played the original, this installment had its roots on the Commodore Amiga, later migrating to the Atari Jaguar, before being thrust into the mainstream with this title. The objective of the game is very straightforward; find creative ways to send your opponent's wormy team to the grave before they do the same to yours. The title has a respectable arsenal of play modes; you can square off against the computer on a random battlefield, play multiplayer against 3 of your friends (or foes), or run the gamut of Basic Training to prepare yourself for the 30 single player missions.

The game takes place on a 2-D cartoonish battlefield (locales ranging from junkyards to large pieces of cheese), with equally toonish, armless worms representing your on-screen armada of doom. This is a turn-based

Get yer hand outta mah face, sucka! THESE worms kick some ass!

game; you are given 45 seconds each turn to move one of your teammates around the battlefield, aim and shoot your weapon, plant a land mine, throw a grenade, or toss a flying sheep at your opponents. This goes back and forth until one team is eliminated. The sheer variety of weapons at your disposal is dizzying; your destructive tools range from banana bombs to battle axes, holy hand grenades to mad cows. The explosions are typically large and satisfying; the distance your opponents (or even your own teammates) fly on impact from a rocket, and the sat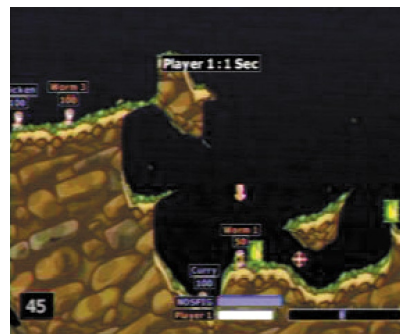isfying gurgles they make as they drown are even more titillating. Don't like where your worm has landed? No problem! You can ninja-rope or bungie-jump your way to a new spot. For the base jumpers among you, take a flight off a cliff, rip open a parachute and rain smoking death with mole bombs before landing ever so softly on the ground.

This game is THICK with twisted humor; your worms don't merely die, they check themselves out with a detonator. They don't just take shots, they cry about it like babies. Hit your own team's players, get called the worm equivalent of Benedict Arnold. And these guys don't forget

Larry's worm is beaten senseless. Wait, that's not what I meant...

about the important stuff; tombstones stand where your brave worms once roamed, as a reminder of your effective command of the battlefield.

The game does have its drawbacks: the computer AI. It takes the majority of its 45 second turn to decide what it's going to do; this can lead to some rather slow gameplay. It's no wonder that the multiplayer option (especially on the PC version, which can be played over the Internet) is the most popular choice for serious worm-shredding. Also, the sound is rather sparse; some good bass-thumping rock and roll would've increased the intensity during particularly nasty engagements. However, good marks for the explosions, and the whiny voices your worm counterparts speak in.

If you enjoy this title, Team 17 has followed this game up with **Worms: World Party** (which includes online play with the Dreamcast version), and soon to deploy, **Worms: Blast** (a game very similar to **Bust-A-Move**, twisted into a Worms-themed world). Next time you see something slithering across the ground after a good rain, consider the mayhem our video worms buddies can cause before smashing it to bits. You may find yourself on the receiving end of a suicide bomber worm, holding an exploding mad cow… would you really want to mess with that?

Dave G, batting cleanup, not doing windows

Element	Dave	Larry	Yoda
Graphics	5	5	5
Sound	6	4	5
Gameplay	7	8	5
OVERALL	6	6	5

Features:

- Variable skill levels
- Cotton candy
- Prototype coin-op

I tend not to play too many "realistic" sports games. Aside from the wonderfully executed **Tennis 2K2** (the latest installment in Sega's **Virtua Tennis** franchise to the two clowns who haven't played it yet), pretty much all of the sports games I play are on the other side of the fence. The side of the fence where basketball players can leap OVER the rim with the greatest of ease. The side where football players pile-drive each other as if they're reenacting a pay-per-view wrestling match. And the side where baseball pitchers can literally steer the ball with their evil thoughts as it crosses home plate. My kind of sports video games indeed.

It's probably a bit of a stretch to call PlayBall! a "sports" game, but at the very least, it's a "sports-themed" game. Either way, it's not terribly realistic, so it's definitely my kind of sports game. The star of PlayBall! is a round character dressed in red sneakers, a matching red visor, and an oversized baseball glove. You know those oversized foam fingers that say "we're number one!"? Same idea, but here it's a baseball glove. And it's perched atop our armless friend's scalp.

PlayBall! most closely resembles a multi-ball **Arkanoid** variant (although it predates Arkanoid by a few years) played in a stadium, a spin on the genre that wouldn't turn up again until 1987's **Free Kick**. It offers silly characters, hi-quality digitized speech, and offbeat play as an incentive to try yet another **Pong/Breakout** descendant. Here, although you can only move left and right, you can also

wrap around from the left side of the screen to the right and vice versa. The wrap around feature is especially helpful in later levels where the pace picks up significantly and there are more balls to contend with. Er, yeah.

Two levels of seats are occupied by a handful of fans, a concession vendor, and a shady character bent on –literally– bowling your character over… with a vengeance! The vendor tosses out a variety of balls, including beach balls, footballs and soccer balls. The player must attempt to "catch" the balls by volleying them back upward. After a few successful bounces, the balls will finally be "caught" and will disappear. Volley / catch enough balls and you'll clear the round. The secondary task is to steal as many bases as possible. Bases randomly appear throughout each level, running over one tacks on some additional points. Additional bonus points are scored if you can manage to scarf up the peanuts, cotton candy, and other snacks that intermittently drop down from the stands.

All of the balls must be caught EXCEPT for bowling balls - catching one causes our neutered friend to explode. Missing three balls on any round of the game will likewise cost the player a life. If a fan manages to jump out of the stands and land on a base, "Yer out!" Deduct one life. Where else are you

A huge crowd has turned out for today's game!

going to see a fan jump onto the field at a sporting event and call a player out, instead of getting beaten and escorted out of the place by security?

The third round brings on a slightly different challenge: smashing bowling balls with a baseball bat! At the start of the round, the vendor tosses out a bat. Miss it and you'll regret it immediately, as bowling balls rain down like something out of **Kaboom!** If you manage to catch the bat, it will replace the baseball glove and begin swinging away. Smash as many bowling balls as possible before the bat disappears, leaving our PlayBall! pal helpless yet again.

If it sounds like there are lots of things to keep an eye on here, it's because there are. Luckily, pressing the button grants you a time out. Time outs temporarily freeze all the balls in play, giving you an opportunity to catch your breath and collect a few extra stolen bases. Save 'em up if you can, they come in handy in the later rounds! Speaking of the later rounds, as you progress further into the game, more fans show up to cheer you on. Nice touch.

If you're looking for a realistic sporting game, you'll want to skip PlayBall! in favor of something else, probably something with "Madden" or "2K2" in the title. On the other hand, if you need a break from the more sportslike sports sims and you tend to gravitate toward Breakout styled games, check this one out. It may be neutered, but it's still got balls. Lotsa balls.

RANDOM REVIEWS

SEGA CHOPLIFTER

Tony Bueno swoops down behind enemy lines to retrieve this review

Element	Tony	Dave	Joe
Graphics	7	6	7
Sound	6	5	7
Gameplay	10	5	5
OVERALL	9	5	5

Features:

- Tough chopper action
- SORTIEs
- Mission based play

Don't know if this counts as a "gender neutral" game, but GOD DAMN IT this is a hard theme for which to write!

Here you're a single-gunned helicopter vs. ground, sea, and air targets, with helpless hostages to save, and no outside help. My kind of odds!

Beauty is simplicity for **Choplifter**. One joystick, two buttons – one to turn, one to fire. Engage hostile targets, pick up the prisoners of war, then take them back to your base. Level 1 – desert, 2 – high seas, 3 – forest and caverns, 4 – city rooftops, 5 - ? (write and let me know if you've gotten this far!).

Writing synopses of plot, objectives, and action really doesn't do this title justice. What we have here is an incredibly (almost impossibly) challenging scenario that will reward players skillful enough to excel.

As in many other classic shooters, you are never out of danger in Choplifter. Merciless (albeit mindless) enemies surround the player at all times. Lava, enemy fire, and enemy aircraft make sure there is never a dull moment. You must rescue at least 20 hostages to advance to the next level, but the slow, cumbersome, not-too-maneuverable chopper holds only 8 passengers at once, so at least 3 trips are necessary. Once you have picked up your passengers, back to the American base to drop them off, then do it all over again until you've got enough to safety. If the

Dan Gorlin's original Choplifter game looked more like the Atari 5200 version shown here

'copter is destroyed while carrying any passengers, you have to go even further into hostile territory to meet your quota. More than 12 killed and it's back to the drawing board as you must restart the whole level. You also must watch your fire when there are men on the ground, lest you inadvertently cause their demise. There are many other subtleties, such as tanks which appear if you are stationary on the ground, the chopper turning half way around to bomb the tanks, P.O.W. camps and submarines to blast open, the variety of enemy aircraft, the fuel gauge, and physical obstructions like sea masts on sea vessels, stalagmites, and building architecture as obstacles. Sounds tough, plays even tougher.

The refugees applaud Tony for his valiant efforts. And for not "accidentally" shooting them.

As far as side-scrolling shooters go, I much prefer this one over **Defender**, **Super Cobra**, **Scramble**, **Vanguard**, or **Zaxxon**. Don't get me wrong, all of those are spectacular games. But Choplifter is superior. The simple, almost minimalist graphics are nonetheless unmistakable. A strident yet slightly ominous soundtrack complements the action beautifully. Action often gets so intense and

requires such skill and dexterity that I often find myself entering a sort of "zone" when I play. **Robotron** is like that, too, but there are some major differences. Robotron's zone is more of an intense, highly aggressive, move-your-eyes-1000-directions-at-once, blood pressure sky high, DIE!, DIE!, DIE! zone, while Choplifter has more of a sort of anxiety-filled, tension mounting, hold-your-breath-while-dodging-enemy-fire-right-before-landing, GET AWAY FROM ME kind of zone. I guess it all comes down to personal preference.

One of my all-time favorites, Choplifter is perhaps the toughest game you'll ever love. Recommended for those who agree with the notion that the path is ultimately more satisfying than the goal.

This game is tough. Even tougher if you don't insert any coins.

Roloff DeJeu doodles a bit and then stops because he's being watched

Element	Roloff	Dave	Joe
Graphics	6	6	8
Sound	4	5	7
Gameplay	7	8	9
OVERALL	6	7	9

Features:

- Player controls point of view
- Halo effect joystick
- Doodle City bonus game

If there's such a thing as Robo-mythology, one storyline that keeps coming up is that of the inner-robot. However well a robot is made and mimics a human, it will never be a human. From *A.I.*'s David to *D.A.R.Y.L.L.* and from the silly *Short Circuit*'s Johnny 5 to the gentler T-1000 in *Terminator 2* as well as the many robots of Isaac Asimov's stories (including *Star Trek: The Movie*, for which he wrote the screenplay), robots have shared their intimate, tragic feelings with us.

But only Atari managed to truly put us as close to the inner-robot as ever-yet. Also known as "one of the most impressive failures in arcade history", **I, Robot** hit the parlors in 1983.

The cabinet design stood out from all other arcades. Atari used a design that was similar to that of **FireFox** and the dedicated **Major Havoc** cabinet. The 19" horizontally positioned color CRT monitor was enclosed in a square box, which was supported by a sleek base / pedestal. The game was the first to feature a unique trigger-joystick, the patented Halo-effect joystick. With this joystick, the player controlled another first: the point-of-view. This was not just a gimmick, but actually a feature that you needed to successfully play the game. With alternating angles came of course the most important

achievement of this arcade: it was the first to feature fully shaded polygon graphics.

The aim of the game is not too complex. You control a sexless, neutered "interface robot #1984", and have to destroy the Evil Eye that's watching you, by removing it's protective shield. You do this by gliding over the red parts of maze

If the giant eye is open, DON'T jump. Got that? You've been warned.

/ platforms you balance on. Other than that you jump around and shoot various obstacles on your way to the next level. One of these next levels is outer space, through which you fly and shoot more polygons and such. In all there's 99 levels to advance through, but finishing certain levels allows you to skip a few.

If Spielberg would have been a true robo-connoisseur, he would have named *A.I.*'s Rouge

We TOLD you NOT to jump. Sheesh!

City "Doodle City" (well, okay, that wouldn't have made much sense), after the oddest feature to hit the arcade for the first time. For the price of two lives and a credit, players could doodle around for 3 minutes and paint

with the game's sprites, in 3D space, no less!

Unfortunately the game was given the wrong finger by players, and was highly unpopular, only played by geeks and robo-lovers. Legend has it that only 1,000 coin-ups were made (actually retrofitted FireFox cabinets), and that of these only 500 were sold. The rest was shipped off to Japan. It's more likely though that a run of 1,500 machines was done.

If you want to see I, Robot in action, check the out-takes on the DVD of *The Goonies*, where it's located in a convenience store. If you like robots, and are somehow not familiar with Asimov's work, I, Robot, his first short-robot-story collection, is a great starter.

If you want dedicated tech-info, there's a shrine dedicated to the game: http://www.mameworld.net/shrines/irobot/irobot.html
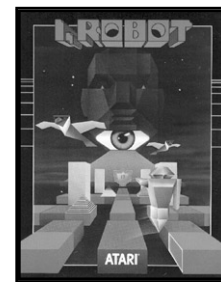
The promo flyer helps to set the bleak tone of the near future.

Take a good look at the cabinet. You might never see one of these coin-ops in real life, and that's just not fair.

Half the calories, same refreshing reviews!

Lite

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Eyes
Rock-Ola, arcade as seen by Dave G — ⑤

I watch a lot of bad movies. On purpose. Among them, the original *13 Ghosts*, *Uncle Sam*, and *The Screaming Skull*, a film that promised viewers a free funeral if they died of fright while watching it. The Screaming Skull is, literally, an excuse for a stagehand to go around lobbing a (very) plastic skull into various scenes for pretty much no reason. Then, whomever the skull happened to be attacking would catch the skull and hold it up to their throat, face, etc. while screaming in terror. It's a "great" bad film.

It has a sister film called *The Crawling Eye*. I haven't seen it yet, but it's on my "to do" list of awful B-movies to see. In the meantime, I've got Rock Ola's creepy coin-op, **Eyes**, to keep my peepers peppered with B-movie images of disembodied, deadly orbs.

In Eyes, you control a giant eyeball capable of shooting daggers - laser daggers. Four similarly equipped evil eyes chase you in standard cat and mouse, maze game fashion. Clear each maze by shooting all the targets, and along the way, wipe out as many of the enemy eyes as possible.

While it might sound like another **Pac-Man** clone at first listen, it's actually a lot closer to the Tank round in Bally's **Tron**. If your eye gets caught in an alley and can't turn out of the path of enemy fire in time, you're toast. Unlike Tron, your turretless eye can only fire in

the direction that it's looking. Like Tron, you also want to avoid crashing into the enemies.

Eyes strikes me as one of the more "quiet" games at the arcade. It doesn't offer anything terribly new and exciting to make it stand out from the maze game crowd, and it's not a game you'd immediately run to as soon as you walked in the door. It IS a game that would have wound up on the play list though, probably later on in the evening when you were trying to stretch those last few tokens out until closing time.

Eyes' eight levels are distinguished by different colors, targets, scoring, and slight difficulty ramping, but the actual maze remains the same. The game isn't all that difficult, and once the player reaches the final round, the computer is really just waiting for the player to get careless. Note: the score rolls over at a million, so if you're shooting for the high score table, keep a spare eye on it.

Eyes' groovy background sounds are worth mentioning. Imagine the sound of a bunch of glass spiders walking along a patch of thin ice. Listen as the ice begins to crack and give way underneath the spiders' spindly legs without breaking all the way through. The sounds you're hearing in your mind's eye (ear) are the creepy background sounds from Eyes.

Like the similarly named movie,

Eyes. Pac-Man wanna-be, or B-movie wanna-be?

Eyes is a fun diversion, and is ultimately more fun than frightening. It doesn't toss anything at us that we haven't seen before, but what's there is still worth a glance. If you're the type of movie aficionado who insists on watching only landmark films like *Citizen Kane*, the *Godfather*, or *Pulp Fiction*, Eyes probably isn't for you. If, however, you relish the thought of kicking back in front of the tube every now and then and popping in mediocre B-flicks like *The Warrior*, *In Your Face*, or *Death Nurse*, look for Eyes at an arcade near you.

Make Trax
Williams, arcade painted by Tony Bueno — ⑥

I don't understand this. I was fully prepared to rip on this title to no end and give it a 3 or lower. But I felt it just

wasn't fair to play a few games and abandon **Make Trax** without a second thought. Subsequently, I've acquired a taste for this oddity. Go figure.

Your androgynous character here is represented by a paintbrush. You must paint the entire threshold of a section of highway while avoiding two surprisingly intelligent fish. There are two rakes, which make you travel faster and may be used to flatten the fish, but they only go in one direction and only for a short duration. Several onscreen boxes contain other harmless enemies

Make Trax, also known as Crush Roller

including bare feet, a mouse, bird, automobile, and cats. These adversaries mark up the street and force the player to repaint whatever section they traverse, but are killed simply by touching them and otherwise pose no real threat.

Stupid? Um, yeah. Pointless? Well, yes, but then what game isn't, when you really come right down to it? Fun? I guess. Maybe. I don't know. This game actually kind of sucks, to be quite honest, but I still feel compelled to play. Therefore, I am giving this one a passing grade. If anybody said that this game was lousy and not worth playing, I'd be at a loss for words because deep down inside, I am not sure if I agree.

Play this one at your own risk. Or better yet, make tracks.

Tempest 3000
Atari/Hasbro, Nuon dreamt by Russ Perry Jr. — ⑦

Here's another game where what you play is pretty much unknown, so gender is ever more unknown. Your icon onscreen is merely referred to as "The Claw". Let's just leave it as neuter and be done with it, before someone makes a reference to Baron von Raschke.

First of all, this game is utterly beautiful -- there's stuff moving, shaking, pulsing and exploding all over the place, even just in the menus trying to get the game started. Color, motion, contrast, symbols. It matches well the electronic music that goes

with it all. Mind you, in some ways the graphics are a bit sparse, in that there's just a black background behind it all, but you'll hardly notice.

Of course, this is a Jeff Minter game, so one should expect all manner of lovely beasties in amongst the psychedelic eye candy. Flossie is quite prominent, for instance. And this thing integrates sound & visuals so closely it's like just another version of the Virtual Light Machine, only you're doing something other than just shaping the images directly. It's glorious!

The only problem is, it's a bit hard to play. The control is smooth enough really, but this game really demands a paddle controller, or perhaps some alternate control schemes so I can find one that works better for me. Basically, if you push the controller left, you go clockwise, and push right, you go counterclockwise. I think a scheme 60 to represent the web you're on would be easier to use. There were times when I felt like something had grabbed me because I'd stopped moving accidentally, or other times I'd be halfway around the web before I realized I wanted to go the other way, and end up moving away from what I wanted to shoot at.

Still, it's a fun game. Just be careful to focus on what's coming out of the web at you -- don't let the background & explosions distract you from the task at hand. If you're a Tempest fan and have a Nuon, there's no reason not to pick this up. If you already have a DVD player, and it's not a Nuon, it probably won't be worth picking up a Nuon and this game, unless of course you're an obsessed collector, or obsessed Tempest fan. If you need a DVD player anyway, then what the heck, get a Nuon, and why not pick up Tempest?

Wacko
Midway, arcade
whacked by Tony Bueno ②

Upon learning that **Wacko** was available on MAME, I looked forward to playing this all but forgotten arcade title from my youth. I remembered reading in Video Games and Computer Entertainment that many had actually been recalled due to the game's asymmetrical cabinet. Maybe that's why you (or at least I) never see any of these even in the retro section of the arcade. Given the overall quality of Wacko's gameplay, however, this is really no great loss.

At your disposal is a little androgynous green alien who merrily flies around the screen in his/her single seat saucer. You must blast a variety of presumably unfriendly aliens resembling dragons, vampires, werewolves, and hunchbacks, among others. The twist here is that there are always two of each enemy on screen, and these two must be shot in sequence to dispose of them. After level two, if the monsters are not shot in order, they become "mutants," which are monsters with mismatching half sections. Mutant pairs can be shot for extra points or unmixed by firing on them again. Get rid of all the monsters to go on to a level with more monsters at a faster rate.

That's really all there is to it. Unfortunately, nobody seemed to realize that this would inevitably get real old, real fast. But the vices of Wacko don't end here, however. Graphics are below average all around, but uneven in that the creatures have an almost passable appearance (eerily reminiscent of, although inferior to, **Tapper**, **Timber**, and **Domino Man**'s sprites) and the backgrounds are just pathetic. Done in unattractive colors and taking place in very, very unimaginative settings, it's like they just didn't care about this aspect of the game. Despite the varied appearance of your adversaries, not one of them has any special characteristics to distinguish themselves from any of the others. As the game progresses, they all split into mini versions of themselves, which may only be killed once the large ones are all disposed of first. The game then quickly digresses into dodging and destroying all the lil' monsters and sometimes their eggs as quickly as possible. On paper it actually sounds like fun, but even the best premise can be ruined by poor execution.

I'd now like to take this opportunity to offer a few ideas that could have made this one halfway decent. To be fair, I didn't play very far into Wacko, so I may or may not have seen everything it has to offer, but bear with me. First and foremost, give the enemies their own personalities and powers. Shouldn't dragons be able to breathe fire? And shouldn't vampires only be susceptible to certain

Wacko. Forgotten classic, or just plain wacko?

attacks? Rock men (a la The Thing) should definitely be tougher than most other beasts. And why not have them attack at different speeds and in less predictable patterns? A few power up items to your ship would be nice. Maybe a bonus treat for points? Say, why not a special item which could be used to temporarily freeze all bad guys? Oh wait! I've got it! A special "indestructible" adversary who pops up at inopportune times and threatens everything in its path! Not too original, granted, but hell, why not? The ship itself could contain a special cannon with limited ammo to eliminate monsters with one hit and could be used to free up space on the screen. How about a bonus stage between levels? Intermissions wouldn't hurt. Making all characters smaller would eliminate the overcrowding of the screen. Simple interactive background items, like rocks, mountains, or trees could offer cover. An attract mode naming some of these characters would give the game more appeal. Any one of these suggestions could have easily been implemented to make this a better title. Wacko shows a striking lack of innovation and imagination on behalf of the programmers. I mean, Timber may be a bad game, but at least it's playable.

Inscrutably, the main character in Wacko also appeared in another game, **Kozmik Krooz'r**. Why anyone would want to further the adventures of this uninteresting, unimaginative, uncharismatic, and otherwise

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uninspired character is… well… unclear. Games like this support the notion that we have indeed come a long way in electronic entertainment, and Wacko deserves to rank with such losers as **10-Yard Fight**, **Sonson**, **Mikie**, **The Wiz**, **Leprechaun**, and **Section Z** as an arcade game best left forgotten.

Editor's note: Dave G. and his brother Tony B. are usually seen terrorizing arcades together with their wonder-twin-like powers. However, Dave disagrees with Tony on the issue of Wacko, stating that to him, Wacko is a 9 and is in his personal top ten favorite game list.

The Electric Yo-Yo
Taito, arcade
unplugged by Dave G   (6)

The Electric Yo-Yo is one of those obscure games that's probably obscure for a reason. In this case, I'm guessing that it suffered the same fate as another Taito game, (coin-cop cousin?) **Qix**. Qix has often been called the poster-boy of games that people didn't really understand and subsequently never caught on. While Qix certainly had a cult following big enough to bring the game home to the Atari 5200, Gameboy and NES, the gameroom masses largely ignored it. As a fan of Qix, it never occurred to me that it was tough to figure out (red=slow, blue=fast, box in the Qix, 'nuff said) but nevertheless, I've met a fair share of players who just didn't "get it."

I'd like to propose that we elect a new poster-boy for the "I don't get it" games. Instead of Qix, how 'bout The Electric Yo-Yo? I sorta get it, but I don't quite completely get it. Evidently,

neither did anyone else, and EYY had its plug pulled shortly after its low-voltage debut.

The Electric Yo-Yo is a game that you WANT to like, regardless of how good or bad it actually is. The thought of an electric yo-yo alone is groovy, so a game based on one should be fantastic, right? Right. But here, it's not fantastic. It's not that it's bad, but it still has some issues to work out to launch it into the "fantastic" stratosphere.

For starters, real yo-yoing is all about doing crazy, off the wall tricks. Shoot the moon, walk the dog, break the lamp, decapitate the neighbor, what have you. If you have a yo-yo and are planning to impress the ladies by simply dropping it down and making it "sleep", listen up buddy: they ain't buying. Unless you're lamely yo-yoing that way in a polaroid that clearly displays your new sportscar in the background. Then, maybe. Okay, probably.

Anyhoo, The Electric Yo-Yo doesn't take advantage of the "tricks" angle and instead focuses only on how long the string is as its focus for scoring. The screen is littered with various "blox" (there's that Qix heritage sneaking in again) forming patterns that immediately conjure up images of Solar Fox. To grab the blox, simply lasso the loop end of the string around one. The yo-yo will then follow the string back to the loop, ready for another pass. Given the arrangement of the blox, some of them will be caught with only the shortest of strings. The goal is to max out your score by maxing out the length of your string. (Does it strike anyone else that a lot of these "neutered" games would give Freud and his students something to talk about all weekend long?) Clearing each round isn't particularly tough, but clearing each round while revving up your score is an entirely different story.

EYY's cast of neutered friends also includes Bion and Trion. Bions are bug-eyes with little feet, while Trions are bug-eyes that hover about the playfield on a three-dimensional sort of helix that could have come straight out of Qix. Running into Trion always results in death, but Bions can be safely passed through if the player manages to charge up the ol' yo-yo first.

Charging the yo-yo requires either a: luck, or b: quick reflexes and

precision control. As Trion bounces around the screen, it ricochets off of the blox, temporarily charging them. Managing to capture charged blox converts the yo-yo into an electric yo-yo, the perfect tool for really pumping up your score.

Although the graphics in EYY are decent, they could stand to be more whimsical, a little more "electric". The design team was on the right track with the "exploding yo-yo" animation, but didn't follow through with equally clever ideas throughout the rest of the game.
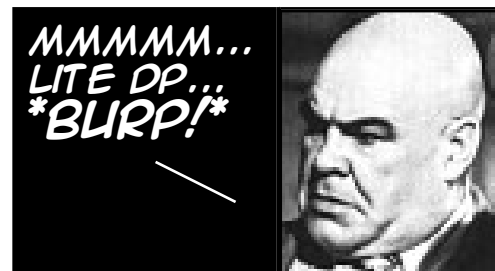
The sound effects, while a bit more fleshed out than the graphics, could also use a nudge up the scale. A cool electricity sound-effect precedes the rolling out of each new yo-yo, and the explosion sounds are spot on. Still, it's almost as if an extra layer of sound is absent, like an Oreo with only one outer cookie piece. A little opening and/or closing musical theme perhaps, the kind that would get stuck in your head and emerge during boring business meetings or other such "real life" downtime. Instead, we've only got fundamental sounds to listen to, nothing shockingly original aside from the standouts already mentioned.

Nope, it's not Solar Fox. It's Taito's Electric Yo-Yo.

Pity, as the Electric Yo-Yo is a game that, merely based on the title, should be one we're all familiar with. Since the game didn't rise up to the level of its namesake, instead of getting a variety of home conversions, EYY quickly disappeared. Leaving us human yo-yos with drawers full of boring old "acoustic" yo-yos instead.

*MMMMM… LITE DP… *BURP!**

THE WACKY WORLD of... ALAN MILLER

interview by Al Backiel

DP's Al Backiel had the opportunity to sit down and converse with another one of the biggest Al's in videogame land, Alan Miller. Part 1 starts here...

DP: Was Atari your first employer after graduating college?

AM: No, I graduated from the University of California at Berkeley in June 1973 with a Bachelors degree in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science. I started working at Atari about four years later, in February 1977. In the first four years after graduating, I worked in various electrical engineering jobs in Silicon Valley, first for an industrial control company, then on NASA projects, and just prior to Atari, for a semiconductor manufacturer.

DP: What was the best source for game ideas? Marketing, arcades, meetings, users, or programmers?

AM: For me, it was none of those. My first game for the Atari VCS, **Surround**, was assigned to me. After that, the best source of game ideas for me was thinking them up myself. In the early days, the extreme hardware constraints eliminated most obvious game designs. So, game concepts had to be developed with those constraints expressly in mind. After I came up with a concept that I thought would be fun and could be implemented, I wrote it up and discussed it with others in the group, like David Crane, Bob Whitehead, and Larry Kaplan. Few of my game ideas were abandoned. Of course, we also played all the arcade games as well as the home game carts that were already available from Fairchild and RCA. All of these, I'm sure, had an influence on us.

I had some previous experience thinking up interactive entertainment, but not for video games. As the eldest of six kids, I felt a lot of responsibility to help take care of my five younger brothers and sisters. I enjoyed coming up with new games and activities to entertain them and keep them occupied. I also played a lot of board and card games and participated in a lot of sports as a kid and played on my high school's basketball and baseball teams.

DP: The game Surround started out as **Blockade**. *Were there any other name changes in any other games that you can recall?*

AM: Surround was never called Blockade. Surround was based on a game play concept implemented in several arcade games in the mid-'70s, such as Atari's **Dominos**, Gremlin's Blockade, and Meadow's **Bigfoot**. I don't remember its working title. I don't think it had a marketing title other than Surround. If it did, it wouldn't have been the name of a competitor's game.

The title of an Atari VCS game I programmed called **Hunt and Score** was also later marketed by Atari under the title **A Game of Concentration**. In the early days of the VCS, Atari frequently changed the cart titles for games marketed under the Sears Tele-Games brand. **Hunt and Score** was called **Memory Match** for Sears.

DP: You stated that that Surround was never Blockade. I actually got that bit of information from a list of the first nine Atari 2600 releases that appeared on screen in the Atari at 20 *videotape series. Perhaps this was not an official*

Alan Miller, with a handful of post-Activision games.

list? It was hand-written. Or was this just someone's personal notes?

AM: I haven't seen the *Atari at 20* tape and can't yet comment on what was shown. I'll try to find a copy. I doubt that there ever was any meaningful list like you describe. I started working at Atari on Feb. 22, 1977 and was assigned which game I'd do for my first game. So, I began working on Surround in late February or early March 1977. Surround was introduced about 14 weeks later at the June 1977 CES in Chicago. I did not personally attend that show.

I don't think nine different games were under development in the Feb-June timeframe, but I suppose it's possible. The only game programmers in Atari's Consumer Group at that time were Larry Wagner and Larry Kaplan who joined in late 1976, Bob Whitehead, who started in Jan 1977, and Gary Palmer and me, who started in Feb. 1977.

Joe Decuir, who was more of a systems/chip designer, did the **Pong** cart. Larry Wagner started the *Combat* cart and Larry Kaplan helped finish it after he completed **Air Sea Battle**. Bob did **Starship** and then **Blackjack**.

As I recall, Gary did quite a bit of development system design before he started a cart. When we arrived at Atari, their game development process was not very sophisticated. Larry and I had worked on DEC PDP-11 systems before joining Atari and we convinced the company to start using these minicomputers. Atari had been using the very simple KIM boards for code debugging. Gary designed a pretty good debugging station.

So, to the best of my knowledge, Surround was never called Blockade. Atari's own arcade version of this type of game was called

Dominos. http://www.klov.com/D/Dominos.html. Gremlin's version was called Blockade. http://www.klov.com/B/Blockade.html. I really doubt Atari's marketing people would have started out naming it with the name of a competitor's product.

DP: Were there routines or features in your games that had to be scrapped because they would have exceeded storage?

AM: Yes, that happened all the time. Most early VCS ROM carts were only 2k bytes. Programmers had to put tremendous effort into implementing a decent game in that small space. I remember that among many other features I had to kill, I was always frustrated by not being able to devote enough ROM space to computer opponent AI in my games. Additionally, there were only 128 bytes of RAM in the VCS, which also tremendously limited what could be done.

My game, **Hangman**, was the first 4k byte cart for the VCS, but the extra space in that cart was simply used to store additional words. Being the first one to use that part. I had to electronically qualify it with the ROM vendor, Synertec, to make sure it met the timing and current requirements of the VCS.

Bank switching circuits were eventually developed for the VCS that allowed programs to be larger than 4k bytes. I've heard that some of our competitors VCS games got up to 16k bytes. Also at Activision, the Display Processor Chip (DPC) was eventually developed, primarily by David P. Crane (DPC), which added significant additional power to the VCS. Unfortunately, that was near the end of the VCS' lifecycle and I think only one game, **Pitfall II**, was developed with it.

To put that into perspective, a modern single CD game is 650 megabytes, which 325,000 times larger than our first VCS game carts. Modern computers probably average 128 megabytes of RAM, which is 1,000,000 times more RAM than the Atari VCS

had. A modern game requires several man years of development effort and averages about $5 million in development cost. At Atari, development of a VCS cart took about 0.3 - 0.5 man years at a total cost of about $8,000 - $15,000.
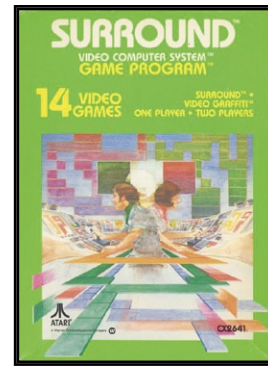
DP: You were a contributor to the operating systems of some Atari computers. Do you prefer systems programming or applications programming?

AM: I strongly prefer applications programming. I like seeing tangible results of my work. OS programming is obviously necessary, but I didn't find it particularly rewarding. But I'm very proud of the OS we created for the Atari 400/800. It was similar in complexity to QDOS, the OS that Microsoft licensed a couple of years later from Seattle Computer Products and renamed MS-DOS for the IBM Personal Computer. However, the Atari OS was much better designed in terms of its user friendliness and it had a much, much richer graphics subsystem and many fewer bugs.

It's a minor miracle that the Atari OS got done at all and there's an interesting story there. Atari had been designing a personal computer for a couple years and had a group of programmers working on the OS for a long time. Atari then pre-announced that the computer would debut at the January 1979 Consumer Electronics Show. About twelve weeks before the CES, Jay Minor, who was heading up the computer custom chip and OS software development, threw up his hands and said the

Many fans of the 2600, find Miller's Starmaster superior to Star Raiders

OS group had failed and that they couldn't possibly be ready for the show. It would have been a terrible embarrassment for Atari to fail to deliver the computer at the CES, since they had been trumpeting it very loudly.

At that point, my boss, George Simcock, who managed the game programmers, volunteered that some

of his guys could complete the OS in time for the show. So, we brought in a consultant Harry Stewart, who helped David Crane, Larry Kaplan, and me on the OS design. I asked Gary Palmer, who had been an early VCS game designer, but had left the company, to come back to work on the I/O portion of the OS. Ian Shepard, developed the disk drive functions. And we farmed out the BASIC language design to a local consulting firm called Shepardson Microsystems. The entire project was

Alan Miller's first Atari 2600 game, Surround

completed and at a good beta state in about twelve weeks, well in time for the CES. It was released to ROM after another twelve weeks or so of tweaking and testing. It turned out to be a very good effort from a relatively small group of individuals in a very short time period.

Related to the OS development, all of us on the project strongly urged senior management to make the Atari 400/800 an open design and publish the operating system and hardware manuals. We felt this was essential to making the computer successful because it would encourage outside software development and allow much more software to be developed than Atari could ever produce. Unfortunately, management decided to make it a closed system. A few years later that decision was reversed and the entire listing to the OS was published, but Atari didn't make any effort to sanitize the comments. So, you'll see comments in the listing like, "I hope this works."

Sadly, it was too late to make up for a significant lack of quality software for the 400/800. Had it been made an open system from the beginning, it would have had a much better chance of achieving significant market share like the open system computers from Apple, Commodore, and IBM.

DP: I heard that Atari was pretty laid back as a company as long as you got your work done. Was there a dress code or a drug policy or time constraints imposed?
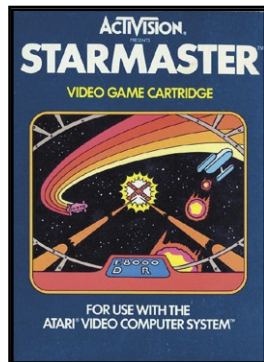
AM: I wouldn't call it laid back. People in the engineering group worked very hard. It's true that it was a casual environment and the kind of clothes you wore was not important in the engineering group. Results were what counted.

Regarding drug use, there's a misconception that it was common in the industry. It wasn't. I worked at Atari from early 1977 to late 1979 and never saw any illegal drugs used on the premises. Same thing at Activision, where I worked from late 1979 to late 1984 and at Accolade from late 1984 to late 1994. I observed no illegal drug use in any of these companies, although it was pretty easy to find everywhere else in the San Francisco Bay Area.

At these companies, we'd sometimes have Friday afternoon parties, where we might have beer or wine, but nothing stronger.

DP: Did they have company rewards like bonuses or parties?

AM: At Atari it was common to have a Friday afternoon "beer bust" with beer and wine. I'd occasionally have a beer, but people didn't get sloshed. There was just too much work to do.

In my first year at Atari, the company reneged on the bonus plan and paid nothing. In my second year at Atari, payment of the bonus plan was contingent on achieving some ill-defined Departmental Budgeted Operating Income (DBOI), which immediately became known as Don't' Bet On It. It, too, resulted in no bonus payments. So despite creating an extremely popular and successful entertainment system that sold millions of units, the company paid no bonuses in these formal plans. However, I did receive an $8,000 bonus in 1979 that was not a part of these plans.

DP: Were there any unfinished games that you were working on when you left Atari?

AM: No. David, Larry, and I worked on

the 400/800 OS from about September 1978 to April 1979. I then completed **Basketball** for the 400/800 and left the company. I didn't work on any VCS carts during my last year at Atari.

DP: Do you have any prototype games in your personal collection?

AM: No. However, at Activision, I programmed an Othello/Reversi game that was never published.

DP: Do you think that if Nolan Bushnell did not sell the company to Warner Bros. that things might have turned out differently?

AM: Yes, definitely, but it's impossible to say how it would have turned out. Atari might have been able to grow without a major capital infusion, but that's difficult to be sure of. Warner put a lot of money into the company, which certainly helped pay for marketing and manufacturing the games and computers.

Sadly, though, the management that was brought in to replace Nolan was totally inexperienced at consumer electronics, particularly video games, and that inexperience eventually killed the company. It's particularly sad to see the vitality of today's multi-billion dollar video game business and realize that the dominant players of the '70's and '80's, Atari and Mattel, who really pioneered the business, are no longer participants.

A 2600 version of tennis was an obvious choice for Miller, an ace tennis player

*DP: Who originally came up with the idea to leave Atari and form Activision?*

AM: As we were finishing the operating system for the 400/800 in early 1979, I decided that I wanted to receive credit for my game design work and some form of royalty compensation. I researched the compensation aspects of the recording industry and the book industry, drafted a contract that would allow me to be credited for my work and receive a very modest royalty, and presented it to Atari management.

After a while, I told my three closest associates at Atari, David Crane, Bob Whitehead, and Larry Kaplan, what I was doing. They joined me in those discussions. We developed a growing impression that Atari was going to agree to some plan along the lines we proposed. We were surprised in mid-year, and our boss was also surprised, when senior management told us they would make no changes. At that time, Atari's pay for engineers was on the low side, generally slightly behind industry average. Whenever we hired a new engineer, they tended to receive a salary higher than the current employees, which was irritating. At that time, David, Bob, Larry, and I accounted for about two-thirds of Atari cart sales, despite that fact that David, Larry, and I had been exclusively working on the computer for many months.

After Atari decided they weren't going to give us credit for our work or pay royalties, I talked with a great engineer who had just left Atari to start his own company, Joe Decuir, and asked for the name of the law firm he had used. He directed to me to Wilson, Sonsini, Goodrich, and Rosati, now an extremely well known firm in Silicon Valley. I made an appointment for the four of us to discuss incorporating our company and raising investment capital.

After meeting with the four of us, the attorneys began that process. In the first meeting they frankly told us that in order to attract venture capital, we would need to have an experienced management person on board. After a few weeks, they put us in touch with Jim Levy, with whom we developed a good working relationship. Larry decided at some point to cease participating, so Jim, David, Bob, and I continued our efforts to raise capital and were ultimately successful. Larry did later rejoin us, several months after we started Activision.

Tune in next issue for part 2 of the Alan Miller interview!
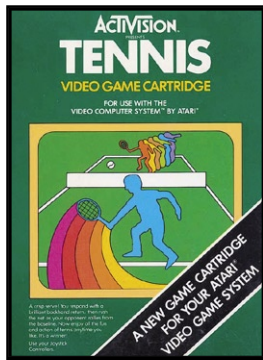
ROMPAGE

Featuring Sean Kelly

Sean Kelly's ROMpage is temporarily offline, as Sean attempts to set a new world record. At press time, we weren't able to ascertain WHAT world record Sean was trying for, but our DP spies sent us this top secret photo that might shed some light on the subject..

Never fear, dear readers, a well-rested Sean will return with a brand new ROMpage column next issue after a much deserved vacation.

This is the first time I've actually put my thoughts down on paper with the express purpose of sharing my insights with the general public - in this case, the readers of Digital Press - and I'm finding that the hardest part of this column I agreed to write is not coming up with the ideas, but deciding how to start my first article! So rather than trying to impress you with any verbal gymnastics, I'll just start with the basics and hope that I don't bore you to death in the first paragraph. My name is Monique Trulson, and for some reason, Mr. Santulli, aka Editor in Chief/Supreme Being/All Around Nice Guy, felt that I could bring a unique viewpoint to this fine publication, being an old-time gamer of the female persuasion. Not only am I a card-carrying member of the Double-X Chromosome Club, but I also have the honor of passing on my gaming addiction to my two children, my eight year old son and nine year old daughter, with the help of my wonderful husband, another gamer from "ye olde days" of

Centipede. By women, for women. Well, sort of. Not really.

Pong, Atari 2600, Sega Master System, and so on. Yes, ladies and gentleman, our house is the "COOL HOUSE" in the neighborhood, with our current selection of 4 gaming systems (well, 5 if you count the Sega Master System under our bed) - a house that comes complete with "COOL PARENTS" who actually play the games more than

the kids. And while these facts may not exactly qualify me to entertain you here in the pages of Digital Press, we must remember what our pal William Shakespeare knew to be a fact..."Do you not know I am a woman? when I think, I must speak." Or, in this case...I must write.

This past Christmas season was an interesting one for us, as I'm sure it was for many parents faced with the choice of the two new systems released just in time to become THE buzzwords most mall Santas heard over and over - Nintendo GameCube and Microsoft XBox. We struggled over which company to sell our souls to, as both systems have their pros and cons - hard to hold controllers, amazing graphics, release day game line-ups - and finally chose the GameCube, based mainly on the listing of games that are "kid appropriate" (ie. the blood loss and body count is below 10%, pixelated female body parts are for the most part clothed, and the objective of the game does not include the picking up of prostitutes). Easy enough, you say - we made the choice, Santa delivered the system, along with several games and various accessories, and life in the Trulson house was good. The GameCube joined our little family of systems, nestling in with the N64, Dreamcast and PS1 currently under the television, and all were happy and excited.

Well, almost all. You see, here's

my quandry - my daughter seems to be less than thrilled with all our systems, as are most of her girlfriends. While I realize this is far from a bad thing, it

If you're good at Galaga, Monique will be your best friend. Practice makes perfect!

made me wonder why. What could have happened between now and the time I was her age, going from house to house to play the latest games with all MY girlfriends? We'd play **Pong** for hours. I positively RULED at **Star Raiders** on my spiffy new Atari. My best friend was the **Galaga** Queen of the arcade at the mall. **Dig Dug**, **Pac-Man**, **Centipede**, **Space Invaders**, **Missile Command** - we took pride in the bruises left on our palms after hours of playing these games against our brothers and each other. I watch my daughter and her friends play some of the games we have, and I'm here to tell you that it just isn't that

way anymore. Perhaps it was the newness back then? Not everyone had a game system in their houses - and those that did were the hosts of many an after-school gathering, my house included. It was *cool* to have a system, therefore playing the system made you cool through some sort of geek-induced osmosis....and the desire to be cool is not gender-specific by any means. Then again, these new

> ## "It's a two way street, and the male population in general plays more video games..."

Memo to Mary Kate and Ashley: You're boring, lame, and you suck. Sincerely, Monique's daughter and friends. PS: you suck. And don't even get us started on uber-creepy Bob Saget. Blecch!

gaming systems are getting more and more expensive, and many of the parents of my kids' classmates are not buying them right off, choosing instead to buy the older systems as the prices drop, or waiting a few years until these new systems are old - so the coolness factor is still there in a way. We hear "YOU have a GAMECUBE? Already? AWWWWESOME!!" quite often from the younger group as they come to play with my kids.

OK, so not the newness...maybe it's the marketing? I've read my share of rants about how the gaming industry has turned their back on the female gaming population, never fear, this is not slowly spiraling into yet another. I understand enough about marketing and 'the bottom line' to realize that companies will pay attention to those that pay attention to them. It's a two way street, and the male population in general plays more video games, therefore more video games are being designed to appeal to their specific tastes. Browse any video game store out there, and the posters you see on the wall, the game boxes lining the shelves, are a far cry from anything that might appeal to your standard feminine tastes. Therefore, is it marketing that

is applying social pressure in a way, making girls think that this is not for them?

Nah. I prefer to think that my daughter has a strong enough sense of self, even at this young age, to realize that playing a game does not make you any less "a girl" than not playing a game would. So what else might be at the root of my little mystery here? I'd have to say it's the games.

Consider the differences between what I had to choose from and what my daughter has. Pong vs. **Metal Gear Solid**, Space Invaders vs. **Gran Turismo**, Centipede vs. **Doom**. My games were basically neutered. I never gave a thought as to WHO was flying that ship as I blew away the bad guys in Star Raiders, because that wasn't a focus of the game. And lacking that focus, it was easy for me to pretend that it was ME. Not some over-endowed chick with big guns, not some studly muscleman - I could transport myself deeper into the game because it left out the extras. I could fly through space killing aliens, I could transform into a little yellow disk and terrify ghosts (ok, that example doesn't really work with the advent of **Ms. PacMan**, but you get the gist), I could jump into a spacesuit, dig into the dirt and try to pump up the bad guys till they popped.

Now I know what you're saying, they have "girl games" out there. And my daughter and her friends have tried them all. It's funny that the one action game that does draw them was actually changed in its design to include a female "star" rather than the originally intended male star - the designers figured that with a hot heroine like Lara Croft, all the intrepid young men out

> ## "My games were basically neutered."

Better get pumped if you think you're gonna beat Monique at Dig Dug...

there would want to buy the game to nurture and protect her through her adventures. THAT one my girl likes. But consider the others. **Barbie Detective**. **Mary-Kate and Ashely Magical Mystery Mall**. The basic message here is fairly insulting, as my daughter and her friends all think those games are lame. "They're too easy!" "That's boring!". If it weren't for companies like Her Interactive, or DreamCatcher, who just ported their Nancy Drew series for the pc on to the GameBoy Advance, I'd say without a doubt that the gaming industry is buying into the whole "girls like fluff" scenario. What they really want is something to challenge them the way I was challenged way back then. **Super Smash Brothers** and it's new counterpart **Super Smash Brothers Melee** are a hit - because there are female characters that can kick the snot out of the guys when properly controlled. Same for **Sonic Adventure**, and we can't forget **Mario Party** -whatever it's up to now. When these fail to entertain, there's always the Classics cartridge for the N64, where my daughter rules in her own right at Dig Dug. THIS is what the girls want - to be included, to have digitized avatars and storylines that aren't condescending or downright ridiculous, to be challenged.

Until that happens, we'll be playing the older games...because while I'm sure my poor dog would disagree, I'd have to say neutered is best.

Monique's daughter and friends think that this Barbie game should be buried for ten thousand years. (Games from the collection of Larry Anderson)

Snarl We BOTH disagree. With a VENGEANCE! GRRRRRRRRrrrrrr!

DVD de jour
by Roloff deJeu

WarGames

Distributed by: United Artists, 1983
Directed by: John Badham
Sound/aspect: Dolby digital 5.1 / 1.85:1
(Region 1 disc was reviewed here)

Plot

A smart computer-nerd kid finds a backdoor into the NORAD's strongest war-simulation computer, when he thinks he's just playing a souped up strategy game. From the writers of *Sneakers* and the director of *Short Circuit*, made in the time that the videogame rage was at an all

time high, and the **Gameline** modem was the hottest new thing, this movie was way ahead.

Commentary Track

The commentary track (recorded in 1998 for this DVD), which features the director and writers Lawrence Lasker and Walter Parkes, is quite entertaining. The team offers lots of background info on the story and script development through anecdotes of their research on hacking and phreaking. They also bring you right back to the good old days. GameWorks, **Missile Command** and 'stoneage' **Pac-Man** are mentioned.

Other Extras

The only other extra is the trailer, which you have to see because of its soundtrack. There's also a little bit of hidden silliness in the main menu, which directs you to a clip from the film where

good ol' WOPR goes tilt while playing tic-tac-toe. Oh, and it comes with MGM's brilliant 8-page collectable booklets, which actually always offer great trivia and info.

Picture

The letterboxed (but not anamorphic) transfer seems to be from an old D1 and the print used is not the cleanest. There are some apparent MPEG artifacts here and there but overall it's of a fine quality, and easily acceptable. You don't get to see shiny new arcades like **Galaga** at this quality often anyway.

Sound

The 5.1 soundtrack is hopefully derived from the 6-track done for the 70mm release. It's not very rich, but it suits the film fine (taken that the original wasn't that rich either).

Overall Feel

With references to weed and other adult things, a theme that's still appealing, the movie is not the kid's flick I remembered it to be. If you think you liked it, you'll like it again, and since it's very unlikely that MGM will release a

full-blown version with tons of extras, so this is it. Pick it up used for nine bucks.
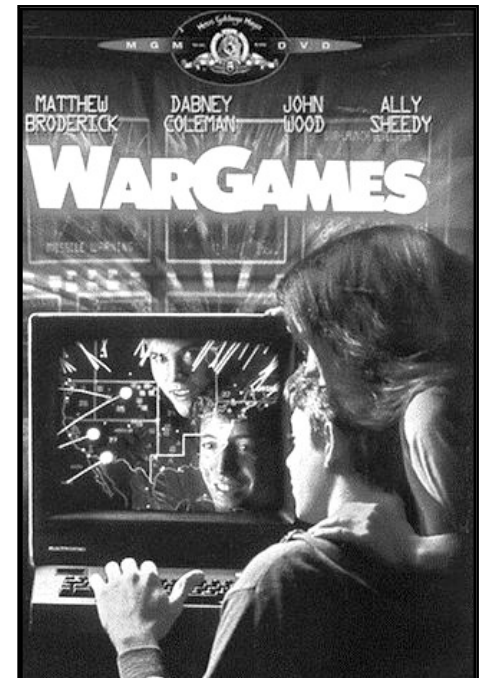
Matthew Broderick and Ally Sheedy star in the film. Further proof that once you've been in a film with Broderick, your career is pretty much over. It's sad, really.
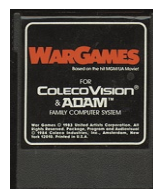
What you say? Someone set us up the bomb? You've gone out and picked up the flick on Roloff's recommendation, but you still haven't had your fill of WarGames? *You can always PLAY* **WarGames** *on your ColecoVision, and we hear that there's even a bootleg of the same exact game floating around for the Atari 8-bit computers... You can also find Thorn EMI's* **Computer War** *for the Atari 8-bit machines as well.*

And if you haven't had your fill of Matthew Broderick, you can still pick up the only thing he's ever done that's any good: Ferris Bueller's Day Off.

Digital Press Funnies

Digital Press proudly presents a comic by world famous comic-guy, Dustin Glick! Be sure to check out http://www.dustinland.com for more of Dustin's zany comic strips and other wackiness. While you're there, you'll also probably want to buy a Birdy shirt. And if you don't know who Birdy is, well then you're just not cool.

DUSTINLAND — A COMIC SO FUNNY IT'LL STEAL YOUR LIVES EVEN AFTER IT'S DEAD WHILE PLAYING TWO PLAYER CONTRA!

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Panel 1: HAVE YOU BEEN TO A VIDEO ARCADE LATELY? GAMES ARE INSANE NOW. THERE'S A GAME WHERE YOU HAVE TO ACTUALLY DANCE - LITERALLY.
YO- HURRY UP- DO THE RUNNING MAN AND YOU CAN WARP TO LEVEL FOUR!
HIP DANCE 5000

Panel 2: THEY HAVE A GAME WHERE YOU PLAY THE DRUMS, ONE WHERE YOU PLAY THE GUITAR - EVEN A FISHING GAME. NOW, WHY YOU WOULD WANT TO CATCH A VIRTUAL FISH, I DO NOT KNOW.
ULTRA BASS! SCORE 501612
YES! I GOT ONE!
HURRY UP! GIVE IT OVER HERE!
VIRTUAL COOKING! 2000 PTS! FLAMBÉ BONUS!!
STIR CHOP

Panel 3: I KNOW I SOUND OLD, BUT I MISS ALL THE OLD SCHOOL GAMES. I GUESS WHEN WE GET OLD WE'LL BE TELLING OUR KIDS "WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE, I ONLY HAD 8 BITS!"
SEE, GRANDSON, I USED TO PLAY "SUPER TENNIS" ALL DAY LONG.
GRANPA, THIS GAME SUCKS ASS. AND WHY DO YOU HAVE TO BLOW ON IT?
001 015

Panel 4: I HATE THAT EVERY GAME IS 3D NOW. I MISS THE OLD SIDE-SCROLLING GAMES WHERE YOU COULD BE SOME HUGE GUY THAT JUST BEAT DOWN CROWDS OF THUGS.
NOW THIS IS WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT! TWO BUTTONS, MAD VIOLENCE, AND FOR ONLY 25 CENTS!
FINAL FIGHT
DUSTIN RALPH EDDIE FREDDIE
GUH! HUH!
PUNCH KICK

Panel 5: NOW ALL THE FIGHTING IS TOO COMPLICATED AND EVERYTHING IS A SIMULATOR. I PLAYED THIS BOXING GAME AND GOT KNOCKED OUT IN REAL LIFE.
WOW, THIS IS FUN. ARE THERE ANY VIRTUAL PRISON GAMES I CAN PLAY NEXT?
BOX-TRON
GAME OVER
YOU LOSE, BITCH!
KO!
$2.50

Panel 6: I SWEAR, SOON YOU'LL BE ABLE TO PLAY YOUR WHOLE LIFE IN A VIDEO GAME. I JUST HOPE IT DOESN'T HAVE ONE OF THOSE LIFE METERS THAT KEEPS RUNNING DOWN NO MATTER WHAT - LIKE IN GAUNTLET.
DUDE, I NEED A QUARTER IN THE NEXT TWENTY TWO SECONDS OR ELSE.
SORRY - I'M BROKE. I THINK OUR BOSS HAS A POWER-UP THOUGH.
DAMN-IT! I DON'T HAVE ENOUGH ENERGY TO FACE HIM!
DUSTIN 22   RONALD 148   BOSS 500
END

ARCADE ANTICS   © 2000 DAVE GIARRUSSO

DOES THIS OUTFIT MAKE MY BUTT LOOK BIG?
IT AIN'T THE OUTFIT...
DAVE GIARRUSSO '00

bubble's size down a notch. Hit too many enemies and you'll wind up not only faceless, but also defenseless.

Entering the drain without clearing the remaining dirt from the sink sends you two boards ahead in the game, and is the quickest way to rack up lots of bonus points. The cleaning lady is another source of extra points – as she sweeps her way around the sink, she'll clean up any bits of dirt she runs across. As she cleans up, the points earned for running her over also increase. Remember: you have to touch the broom in order to grab it. If you run over the cleaning lady without touching the broom first, you won't pick it up.

Bubbles' audio and visuals are as fantastic as the gameplay. Its cool blue color scheme makes you feel right at home, despite the fact that you're in a filthy sink. The water effects, faucet handle animation and characters are all outstanding. The faucet even drips a bit as you play, and can nudge the bubble down toward the drain should you dally underneath it. The drain also flashes red if a cockroach is about to crawl up out of it, and green when it's safe for you to steer the bubble on down.

Like so many of the "classics," Bubbles excels on every level. Controlled by a single joystick, the bubble has exactly the right feel, as though you're maneuvering a real-life slippery soap bubble. Losing the game prompts a "nyeah nyeah nyeah nyeah nyeah" theme song, followed by the final "down the drain…pop!" sound effect. The next time you see Bubbles, don't just let it float past you. Stop and check it out, just like you might stop and check out that other "Bubbles" I once encountered at the arcade so many years ago. And no, I'm not talking about the chimp.

TO THE ARCADE!

GHNNNG…

capture 65%.

Still sounds easy? The Sparx don't sound like much trouble? Well then, bump up to the advanced level, where the threshold is 75%. Oh yeah, and then there are the Super Sparx. You see, after a certain amount of time, Sparx evolve into Super Sparx, which can then traverse the Stix you've drawn. That makes them a little bit harder to avoid! This is, as I recall, the proper arcade experience.

Of course, if you want it tougher yet, Atari has thoughtfully provided an expert level, where you need to capture 85% of the screen and the Qix are pretty intelligent all the way through the game, and the time it takes for Sparx to evolve into Super Sparx is shorter than ever. Good luck!

Oh wait, you want some strategies? Well, if you're playing the novice level (wuss!) you can definitely use patience to your advantage. Draw skinny lines (quickly if you have to) in various places to section off the screen a bit without actually capturing much territory. For instance, build two tall trees one third and two thirds of the way across the screen. That way you guarantee getting roughly 66% without much trouble. Of course, each of these can be sectioned off further so that you trap the Qix in as small an area as you feel safe closing before it touches your Stix. Go for that magical 99%!

On higher levels you won't have the time to be quite so methodical about trapping the Qix, unless it's far away, because every time one of the Sparx comes by you'll have to quickly draw a new box to get out of its way. Still, you can manage to set up lots of small areas for the Qix to meander into, and you can close off passage to other areas to give it less options (note however that there is NO gap that the Qix can't pass through -- it will often avoid small gaps, but not always; still, the smaller the gap, the less likely it will go that way). Still, claiming over 95% is quite possible, at least on early levels.

Things get trickier when you're talking two Qix… One strategy is to

kind of encourage them to be apart by ALMOST splitting them up -- leaving a very small gap they'd have to pass to join back up -- and then drawing small boxes to capture just UNDER the threshold amount to maximize score before splitting them for good with a final Stix across that narrow gap you left. The reason this works is because there is a score multiplier that goes up every time you split the Qix. I'm not sure there's a limit on it, as I've seen up to 7X on one game. Or you can simply (ha!) trap both at once (not too hard when the threshold is low, but tricky when it gets higher). I'm not sure which strategy leads to more points, but if you just try to split the Qix without capturing an amount of territory near the threshold level, you'll be hurting your score for sure.

Scoring is relatively straightforward… If you fast draw, you get 100 points for each percent of the territory captured, and if you slow draw, it's 200 points for each percent captured. Once you pass the threshold, you get 1000 points for each percent over the threshold. Note that if you split the Qix, you won't get that 1000 point per percent bonus, but you'll get the bonus multiplier times the 100 or 200 points per each percent captured under the threshold, and when that multiplier is up there high enough, I'm sure it's a lot of points. Oh, and if you're going to split them, don't be afraid to use the fast draw, since that last Stix won't score any percentage points and you therefore won't lose anything for not using slow draw.

Basically, I liked this game in the arcades, and I this version is pretty well done. I don't think it's for everybody, and even I might have to be in the right mood to play it, but it's pretty solid. An occasional frustration is trying to draw a very small path and ending up with the Fuse getting me because I stopped instead of moving that tiny bit over to start drawing back to my start point (in fact, I just had a brief flash of paranoia that the Fuse was going to start up when I stopped typing briefly to consider what word I should use : -). But there is a decent challenge, some adrenaline moments, and a fair amount of thought and strategy required. A solid game for the time.

NOTE-WORTHY

NEW Atari 5200 game, Koffi Yellow Kopter!

Ron "Cafeman" Lloyd is nearing completion of his first 5200 game, Koffi Yellow Kopter. When Koffi learns of Pyro the Stormcloud's insidious plan to burn down the forests, the little Kopter must take action! Ron plans to make 100 games, complete with box and manual. As of press time, the game is nearly finished, and we can tell you that it looks FANTASTIC. Don't be the only one on your block to miss out on this outstanding new game! Check out http://cafeman.www9.50megs.com/atari/5200dev/KoffiKopter.html for all the details!

Digital Press welcomes NEW official spokesmodel!

That's right, gang! Another year means another new DP spokesmodel, so say hello to the lovely Janice! You'll be seeing and hearing more from her in the near future!

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.