digital

press

66

In our short lives, few of us are lucky enough to have met someone who shares our passions for things so precisely that their passion fuels our own. I am one of the lucky ones. I met young Kevin Oleniacz in 1970 on my first day of Kindergarten at St. Catherine's of Bologna, a catholic school set in rural Ringwood, NJ. Kevin had a disability of sorts and this was immediately obvious. Pale and stiff, he moved awkwardly. But he was also immediately likeable and we quickly became best buddies.

Kindergarten friends fall away fast but in a private school you are somewhat forced to interact with the same kids year after year. I still vividly remember the other kids that followed this path all the way through the 8th grade. I got along with just about all of them, but Kevin and I had identical interests. Writing goofy stories. Drawing mazes. Monsters. And games. We met long before videogames but enjoyed electronic LED-based games and even board games. We'd get together every Sunday and play. Since Kevin wasn't able to do any kind of physical outdoor activity, he was particularly obsessive about his gaming. As the years went by, we shared countless hot summer days battling head-to-head in a tiny air-conditioned room.

The first videogame we ever played together was, ironically, *Pong*. He had it set up on a small black and white television. Some of those battles were so intense that we'd both end up sweating. Who needed basketball, baseball or football? Then, on one fine Christmas weekend in 1977 Kevin introduced me to his new Atari 2600. This event officially ended the board and LED-based game era for us and ushered in an era that's stuck with me ever since.

As the years rolled by there was an endless parade of favorite games and systems and like most everything else we did together, collecting them became a common interest. We both had lists of games that we owned – and when there was a new purchase to be made we'd try to avoid buying one that the other already had. These lists expanded when we decided to make complete lists of everything so we knew what neither of us had. This went on from 1978 through 1990 when we had clearly tapped out our resources. Oh, the time we could have saved if there was an Internet back then!

In 1990 Kevin came up with the idea of reaching out to others who might be on a similar quest to document all of the game libraries, and we sent letters out to video game magazines explaining what we were doing. We soon learned that there was a blossoming "fanzine" community out there, consisting of others who were starting to share their gaming experiences and philosophy via private paper-mail publications. WE could do that! I pulled a few other friends into the mix, and a few days and a hundred stamps later Digital Press was born. Oh, the name was my idea – I thought if we sounded both professional and ambiguous we would appeal to an older crowd. Kids were not going to be our target. We wanted to connect with adults young and old who had been playing games from the 70's right up to 1991.

Things kept rolling. Kevin was the primary force behind Digital Press from 1991 to 1997. We certainly connected with people and were thrilled that there were so many others willing to "pitch in" on our checklist project. The checklists eventually became the Collector's Guide and the many people we had connected with became the Retrogaming Roundtable. Perhaps the greatest loss the majority of the gaming community will never even know it lost was when Kevin was tragically killed in an automobile accident in November of 1997, one that I believe was triggered by the disability that he had struggled with for his entire life. Everything changed for Digital Press that day, even though the majority of people who know about us now didn't know about us in 1997.

In the 11 years since, this organization has taken many twists and turns, attempted various (sometimes half-assed and ridiculous, which is what happens when I'm in charge) projects and has seen thousands of gamers drop in and out of "the scene". But there is one variable in Digital Press that remains constant: Kevin's passion for videogaming and the quest to bring everyone with that same passion together to enjoy it.

Joe 2009

From the editor's desk...

Why a 'zine?

It's been more than a couple years since an issue of Digital Press last graced anyone's mailbox. At first it appeared to be delayed to death, just a cog in the Digital Press machine that had popped out of place. As time wore on, it became evident that given all the tasty new flavors of DP product, the old 'zine was just no longer necessary. Then Uncle Bill Kunkel paid a visit to the NAVA gang in September and pretty much declared the death of gaming print.

Not so fast.

The advantages of reading paper product over reading on a computer screen have been written about enough. I just want to briefly address the guiding principles of the "rebooted" DP 'zine, which themselves will answer the why, the what, and the how.

"By adults, for adults"
This was supposed to be DP's mode of operation for years. And although the 'zine was unquestionably a creation of adults, did it ever truly feel like an adult product? When Digital Press started it was about gaming into adulthood, with adulthood defined as having made it through high school and college. As we grew into our 30s and (shiver) 40s, it began to feel like DP was stuck in our 20s. Mischief and irreverence will always have their place here, but we've made room for addressing the needs of gamers with careers, mortgages, and children.

"We're not the Internet"
I love computers. I cut my teeth on a C64. I spent sleepless nights creating a clone of *Law of the West* on my Mac. When I got my first PC I ran up a thousand-dollar phone bill online. The DP Web site is like my electronic home. Having said all that...damn I'm tired of the web. At first it's fun to watch a guy scream his head off about how bad games are. Then it gets old. Your mind needs a meal with a little substance. The web is junk food.

"The focus is on gaming"
I always thought the software that came out for Atari 8-bit computers was the same stuff that came out for the Commodore. After reading this issue, I can hardly wait to put together an Atari computer rig and catch up on all those great games I missed because I had this mistaken notion. This publication should inform and inspire your gaming life. If the staff over there on the right turns you on to some great gaming, we've done our job.

Enjoy,
Jeff

****

ON THE COVER
"Game Reset"
by Jeff Belmonte and Eric St-Cyr

Time to reach over and slam down that reset switch. Digital Press is under new management now. Please excuse the sawdust and the loose nails...we've been remodeling. If you're looking for some gently used issue themes, you'll find them out by the curb. Rompage is still around back, and yeah, Hardie, he's there. We hired a few new guys to sweep up...say hi when you have a chance. Sorry about all the rough edges, it's going to take a few issues to sand everything down (boy I've mixed my metaphors pretty badly here).

Let us know what you think of the new place at dpzine@yahoo.com.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

IAN BARONOFSKY

ON THE PROWL

"THE END OF THE YEAR AS WE KNOW IT"

And now it's time for a seemingly endless Rompage-style rant where I tell you what I think is going to happen, as I peer into my lo-res crystal ball and attempt a high score.

eBay has become an unfriendly environment for sellers. Unfortunately I continue to pile on the listings, despite the fact that I don't care for the company. I can't imagine that more than a few percent of sellers feel any allegiance to the website. Most of us would jump ship at the soonest sign of a sure-fire better alternative. I am definitely thinking about www.ChaseTheChuckwagon.com frequently, doing some shopping there, and keeping in touch with Mike Kennedy, the proprietor of the site. The site shows a lot of promise, and I suggest checking out the offerings if you haven't already. Chuckwagon offers free listings, and occasional offerings of lifetime memberships devoid of seller's fees. If the site were to take off, I'm sure there would be some risk in having those accounts floating around if they were to be sold to a very high volume seller. I hope the user agreement makes accounts non-transferable.

Although free listings are the seller's golden goose, let us not forget the fate of no listing fee casualties Amazon auctions and Yahoo auctions in the U.S. (in Japan and some other countries Yahoo auctions is bustling). Anything worth buying was utterly buried in the bilge of low-quality Chinese knock-offs of anything you can think of, listed in high volume. That's actually why I believe you have to charge to sell stuff if you are an auction website, if just to avoid the endless relistings and bottomless pit of the new, the bulk, and the knock off. Clearly I am speaking from the perspective of a collectibles market. I am wondering what Chuckwagon will do when it comes to that point, where a few sellers who bought a lifetime membership are listing 1000 of the same thing, drowning out the legitimate auctions that will build the buying and selling base. The key will be allowing buyers to separate out the relistings from the new auctions. I don't go to eBay to see stuff that has been relisted since Seinfeld's last episode. I want to see fresh hot auction meat ready to be consumed, not last week's jerky.

You can be certain that there is nothing else in my life that I pay so much for to get so little. I appreciate that they have the portal and the customers, but they certainly don't provide the customer service. On a good selling month, I'll put out $1k in auctions and I'll pay about $100 for the privilege. I must send them 3 emails a year, which take 3-5 days for a response, which is never satisfactory or helpful. The ongoing changes to the site never seem to be for the better. The feedback system was broken to begin with, now it's a complete mess. I recently received my first negative from a guy who was upset that I requested that he leave feedback. And you get barred from selling if you have composite ratings of less than 4 out of 5. This makes an incredibly small amount of sense, given that buyers don't even know that is the case when leaving these ratings. Hmm, let's tie subjective numerical ratings of unclear significance to whether or not you are included in the world's largest marketplace. Seems far too tenuous to me to be true. But this is what happens when the board of directors is so far from the customer (which includes sellers and buyers) that operational decisions are made by overpaid executives with shareholders breathing down their necks using data from focus groups and surveys. Do they even use the site anymore? It all reminds me of the facelift provided to Goodwill about 10 years ago. Let's add a bunch of returned merch from the local big boxes to some neon and then we'll sweep the floors. Look mainstream America, it's safe to come in now!

My prediction is that eBay has less than 10 years as a significant P2P (person to person) market force. eBay is so Web 1.0 still we might as well call it eBay 95, as in Windows 95. Auctions need to go open source as soon as possible, and we really should be using competing interfaces, not competing auction websites. Create an affiliate program and a universal feedback system. Link it to the major social networking sites to make it personal. And someone kill Paypal while you're at it! Or rename it OverPaypal.

Price cut!
I hate Walmart, if not for enslaving China, or for life-affirming Black Friday employee trampling, then for the fact that it's not Target. Anyway, I hate that term that they popularized 'Price cut!' with that awful yellow circle. The happy face should sue Walmart for appropriating its happiness into toxic corporate greed. Apologies to those of you in the audience who work at Walmart, I could find the evil in just about anything.
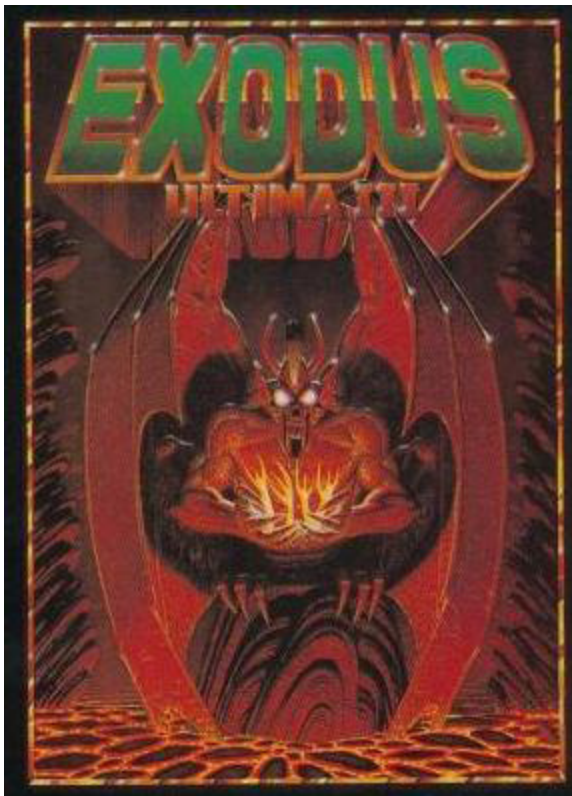

Prices have been trending down on the interwebs, and it pleases me most certainly. With the economy in the shitter, probably at least for another year and hopefully not for much longer, it's a buyer's market. Seasoned sellers with their mountains of R@R3 items are going to have to decide if they want to hang onto those bits for the months or years it will take to get a premium price. Perhaps they will wither indefinitely in the seller's eBay stores. Crappy prices have always been the standard in eBay stores, now with auction prices for loads of premium items tanking, those prices will seem even more unrealistic. The super rare and one-of-a-kind items that come up once a year or less for sale on the Internet still seem to demand high prices.

I think I'm most amazed by the flea market response to the economic downturn. I figured that sellers would be motivated to gouge in response to what I would assume is greater need on their part. As it turns out, folks seem more likely to work with me, and more interested in taking the money, than they are to sit on their product. It is quite a welcome change.

I was just getting used to sellers' bad attitudes, and here they are listening to reason. Amazing world we live in. I wonder how street level resellers are responding in more seriously cash strapped regions than my currently native Chicagoland.

So for '09, let's look forward to a price cut on most video game collectibles. We deserve it after the long run up in the overly positive economic times of the first part of this decade. However, I don't think it's necessarily all bad news for sellers. My belief is that common items like consoles and common games, when parceled out appropriately, will remain strong sales items. Folks in downtimes are looking for cheap thrills and feelings of better times. Amazingly, NES toasters suddenly have some value again, with or without new 72 pin connectors. I have had pretty good luck selling popular common items for neo-classic systems lately, when priced at market rates. And let me tack this one on to the end; the very high prices we've seen in the last few years for sealed NES games represent an unsustainable market. Those prices will drop in '09.

Price slut!

Here I'll predict that some things are going to rise in price and popularity compared to the last 8 years of irrational exuberance. I think that disk software will do better than it has in the past. Some titles have always demanded tidy sums (like Ultima games or *M.U.L.E*), but my feeling is that software in outdated formats has yet to reach its heyday. Many formerly valuable titles (classic Sierra stuff like *King's Quest* and *Leisure Suit Larry*) have dropped in value. But the slack will be taken up in time by slightly more obscure cult titles, and price will rise faster than the remainder of the market (especially cartridges). Why, pray tell, do I believe this? A disheartening trend I have seen in my quiver of thrift stores involves large numbers of empty disc storage cases appearing weekly, sans discs. I think many of these chains have been instructed to toss the discs and sell the cases. The logic utterly defeats me, aside from potential privacy issues. Which don't seem to be a major concern on the resale front as about 10% of software I find has the original credit card receipt in the box. If huge volumes of disks are being tossed, this will reduce the already limited amount of software made available in the future.

An analogous and more tangible scenario is the en mass destruction of game packaging performed by national chains Game Stop and Game Crazy. At various points in their reselling, most have been ordered to destroy all packaging for used games in order to make room on the sales floor for newfangled gaming systems. It's pretty obvious to me that packaging for systems like Game Boy, Game Boy Color, and Game Boy Advance will experience a ramp up in value in the coming years. This will be particularly true as they reach their collecting heyday.

Nobody can see the future, but we can try to predict trends. It's always nice to take advantage of a down market. If you can afford to add some quality meat to your collection, 2009 will probably be a fine year to do so. Unless you are buying that one of a kind item that you'll never see again, it won't be worth spending yourself into debt for. The amount you'll pay in interest will probably negate any benefit you feel from buying at a low point in the market.

DIGITAL PRESS FEATURE

"YOUR GAMES AND YOUR KIDS"

One topic frequently debated in the hobby of video gaming concerns the proper division of consoles and games into different "generations" representing various epochs in the evolution of the technology. Dependent upon whom one asks, videogames produced between 1972 and the present represent anywhere between two and seven generations of development. The answer depends largely on the criteria one regards as the most relevant. The number of bits utilized by the CPU? Two-dimensional versus three-dimensional graphics? Standalone machines versus online multiplayer capability? Given so many significant criteria, the task of categorizing video games by "generations" isn't an easy one.

An easier division of generations to establish is that of the human beings who actually play these games. All things being equal, it seems reasonable to establish that the pastime of video gaming is currently on its second generation. Those who in the late 1970s and early 1980s represented early gaming's demographic base, broadly defined as persons aged between 10 and 25, are now anywhere between their 30s to early 50s. Most people in this age range have raised, or are currently raising, children of their own. Conceivably, some of these first-generation gamers may even be grandparents by now.

The odds are good that if you're reading this article, you, like me, are one of those parents. You survived middle school, high school, possibly college too. You managed to find a job to support yourself. Despite the unfair and negative stereotypes about gamers, you even managed to attract a mate and have a child or two or more. And through all the ups and downs of life and relationships, the hassles of work, the exhilarations and trepidations of raising children, and the implicit expectation from peers or family that you need to "grow up", you still look forward to picking up a game controller and blasting away at some asteroids, putting Mario through his paces, or capturing the flag on Halo. If the old adage holds true that "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree", then odds are also good that your children - video gaming's second generation - are interested and involved in doing these same things as well.

Regrettably, most of the mainstream media representation of the interplay between gaming and parenting focuses on the downsides of the relationship. We're told letting our children play video games is turning them into fat, inattentive, illiterate sloths. The Jack Thompsons of the world would have us believe video games are programming our children to be conscienceless murderers. Parents such as ourselves, who love our children and our videogames, are dismissed as a minority of oddballs and potentially lacking the appropriate level of maturity for the task of bringing up our offspring to be healthy, productive adults.

Showing kids the ropes (or cables)
So you're a parent, and your crumb-cruncher has finally reached the age - somewhere between three and five - where he's big enough to hold a controller in his hands without trying to ingest it. You decide to break out your old NES Control Deck and teach him the fundamentals with a round of *Super Mario Brothers*. Sixty seconds later he's done, having run headlong two times into the first Goombah, while on the third try he manages to jump...and lands squarely on top of the Goombah. Game Over. Well, there's a first time for everything.

Picking the right first game for

a child is a bit of a balancing act. The bright colors, unique sounds, and interactive elements of pretty much any game out there are going to attract a child's interest regardless of the quality or complexity of the game itself. A game's complexity is probably the most critical thing to consider in searching for an age appropriate choice. Steady, successful achievement of increasingly complex tasks or levels is going to be its own reward. But no matter how pretty a game may look or sound, a young child is going to become quickly frustrated by repeated failures in a game-related task beyond her ability to even somewhat passably perform. Older consoles such as the Atari 2600 or NES are probably going to offer better options than newer ones for a child in terms of finding games that offer up simple tasks employing a minimal demand on hand/eye coordination. The simpler controls and less complex graphics of yesterday's consoles may also free up more grey matter in the budding young brain to process exactly what this button-pushing, stick-waggling activity is all supposed to accomplish.

Be patient. It's somewhat expected for more mature peers to call out directions or advice ("Turn left! No, left!" "Use the widget, not the axe!!") while watching or teaching a game to a friend or sibling. However, a younger child may be a little more sensitive to such terseness from a parent, and may come to regard his inability to advance in the game as a personal failure to make Mom or Dad happy. Encourage their accomplishments, but also gracefully let them make mistakes and develop a natural capacity to beat the level or achieve a certain score.

Little hands and big bucks: Managing kids and collections

It's only a matter of time before your little second-generation gamer looks at the spot in your home where your collection of multiple consoles and games is stored, and it occurs to her that she is very fortunate indeed to live in a home with so much cool stuff. How, then, as a parent, do you direct these thoughts for her benefit?

Much like choosing the first games to let your children play, determining how much access to give a child to one's game collection is a matter worth careful consideration. Depending on the value of your collection, as well as the age or relative maturity level of your children, the answer may not be a consistent one. One shouldn't necessarily give free reign over collectable items known to be worth a good deal of money to someone too young to appreciate the importance of keeping them in good condition.

Conversely, there's something to be said for not making our children too preoccupied in their formative years with thinking about the worth of games strictly in terms of monetary or materialistic value. An appreciation should be cultivated for playing games, not just owning games. I refer to the pile of games for multiple systems in my home as a "library" rather than a "collection". The expectation, as my children (ages 11 and 8) have come to understand it, is that the game library is generally accessible to everybody, but that everybody therefore shares a responsibility to keep the games in good order by putting away what's not being played, not letting discs get scratched, etc. The few things in the library that have significant collector value are clearly known, as is the expectation that these things should not be handled without a parent nearby, if at all. Common sense should ultimately prevail in the course of making these types of decisions.

When we still have to be parents

As much fun as we might have playing or collecting videogames with our children, there are going to be those times when we have to put our "Parent Hats" back on our heads and deal with the real-world responsibilities of child-rearing. Carrying out these responsibilities isn't always fun or easy, but anybody who's been a mother or father for some time recognizes this and knows how to assign the appropriate priorities.

Do your kids have defined limits on the amount of time they're allowed to play video games during the day or week? If they don't, perhaps they should. Several gamer parents I have spoken to about this - parents who can easily be classified as "hardcore" about the hobby - have indicated they're quite comfortable in putting aside their own monomania long enough to establish that at the very most their school-aged children (or younger) should be allowed no more than thirty to sixty minutes of gaming time per day, and this activity should be balanced with reading, physical play, and actual face-to-face communication. Even in the age of the iPhone, these things are still essential for a child's well-being. There will be time enough tomorrow to beat that final boss.

Finally there's the question of game ratings and their role in determining appropriate games for our children to play. The ESRB system is no skin off the nose of a young single adult who is free to play whatever piques his interests. But for gamer parents those little labels on the corners of the game boxes carry a little more weight. Surprisingly, none of the gamer parents I spoke to in preparing this article completely dismisses the ESRB ratings system, but not all of them strictly adhere to it either. At a minimum the system is generally used as a preliminary evaluation tool, but the final decision to allow a child access to any one game becomes a matter of personal responsibility. One parent wrote, "I feel I am able to look beyond ESRB ratings and better choose games that are appropriate for my children. Games with graphic violence and explicit language are generally the games I discourage…" Once again, common parenting sense should be the final arbiter in evaluating the effects of exposing one's children to any individual game.

There's a passage in the Bible that says, "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, thought like a child, and reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up my childish ways." Conversely, I also once saw a bumper sticker that said, "You're only young once, but you can be immature forever." If you can hit somewhere in between these two extremes, you'll do just fine. And so will your kids.

THE BREWERY

"WHAT'S HAPPENING ON THE HOMEBREW SCENE"

It's safe to assume that I like video games. By that extension, I also like the history of video games. Reciting video game trivia, however, is a skill that often goes unappreciated. None of my friends like to hear about how Will Crowther wrote the first text adventure, or how *Super Mario Bros.* sold more than 40 million copies or even why *Final Fantasy* was considered "Final". That's usually when they put their iPod headphones in their ears. Fortunately for myself, I found the Nintendo DS homebrew title *Game Trivia Catechism - The Secret of Mister X* , developed by Multiple:Option.

In *Game Trivia Catechism*, you play in the role of Sally, a woman whose goal is to become the King of Game Trivia Tournament Champion. To achieve this, she devises a scheme to get her cousin Al into the tournament and "coach" him throughout, all the while progressing up the ladder herself behind Al's back. Her plan is to defeat him in the finals and win the $10,000 prize single-handedly. How will the mysterious Mister X fit into this plan...?

The game is divided into four modes: Story Mode, Trivia Mode, Mission Mode, and Practice Mode. Story Mode progresses you through the main story of *Game Trivia Catechism* (obviously). Trivia Mode asks you question after question without any messy plot getting in the way. Mission Mode itself is divided into three different objectives: Combo Missions (get as many questions right consecutively as you can), Grade Missions (answer the majority of questions correctly), and Perfect Missions (answer every single question correctly). Finally, there's Practice Mode, where trivia questions are repeated until you guess the right answer.

Game Trivia Catechism has a professional polish to it. There is a definite retro feel throughout and there's some throwbacks to Japanese quiz games, where the genre is more recognized than over here in the United States (note the Engrish-y title of the game). Even though the graphics are represented only by static pictures of different places, the characters themselves are given a cel-shaded treatment which presents the game a stylized look.

The developers came up with an interesting idea in their approach to music. All of the music used in the game is under the Creative Commons license, which means that the developers were free to use any tracks that they liked in the game without penalty, provided that the game is a non-commercial work and that the original composers were attributed properly. Even though none of the music present was actually composed specifically for *Game Trivia Catechism*, it fits in very well with the "retro" theme. Chiptunes and other 8-bit music are well represented here, with selections from such artists as Eric Skiff, 8-Bit Terror, Breakfast Afternoon, Girljoy, and more.

Of course, none of this really matters unless the trivia is solid. For the most part, it is. There are many questions to answer that pertain to the whole era of video gaming, both past and present. There are no simple questions like "What is Sega's mascot?" but rather, "Which company produces the graphics processor in the Xbox 360?" and "Which actor starred in '*Wing Commander III*'?" (ATI and Mark Hamill, respectively). Even so, that may not be enough for video game nerds like myself who are familiar with many facets of video gaming (and possibly you, too, judging by the fact that you're holding this 'zine). I passed many stages with flying colors, scoring a majority of questions correctly every time. The game does not increase in difficulty, either, as the game progresses.
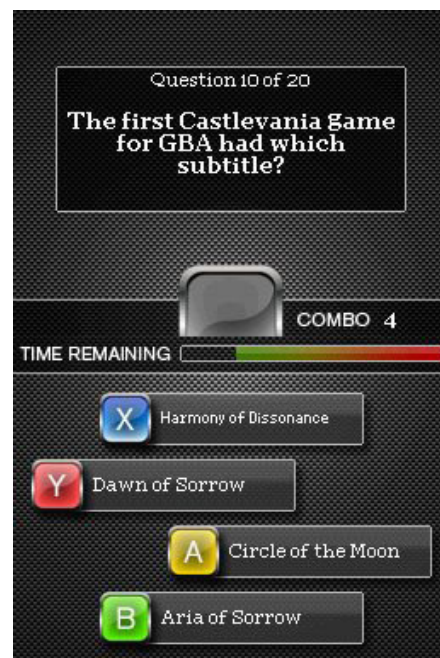
You can't blame the developers, however. It's hard to toe the line and make sure that both those with a "casual" and a "heavy" knowledge of video games stay interested in the game. I would have liked different skill levels with varying questions asked: one tier could contain only "basic" information, while another could contain more challenging, obscure questions. Trivial Pursuit has more than one difficulty; why not this?

Nevertheless, that does not take away from the fact that *Game Trivia Catechism* is a well developed title that's definitely worth your time. Who knows, maybe you'll impress that special someone with the fact that those goggle-wearing monsters in *Dig Dug* are actually called Pookas...eh, maybe not.

Next issue, I'll be taking a look at our favorite golden console, the Intellivision. Until then, remember to sample frequently and savor each brew.

Game Trivia Catechism - The Secret of Mister X: http://multiple-option.blogspot.com/2008/08/game-trivia-catechism-secret-of-mister.html

Multiple:Option: http://multiple-option.blogspot.com/

CLOSET CLASSICS

"JOE'S SLEEPER PICKS"

Necromancer (Synapse, 1982)

You may remember silicon valley-based Synapse for some of its more popular releases: S*hamus, Protector II, Blue Max, Fort Apocalypse*, or the text adventure *Mindwheel* which was originally packaged with a hardcover book. Synapse did their best work in the early 80s on Atari 8-bit computers. They were purchased by Broderbund in 1984 but continued releasing titles under the Synapse name through 1985.

There aren't many games from 1982 that are so complicated that they require a manual, but this is one of them. I tried each of the game's three stages "cold" and had no idea what I was supposed to do. I'd like to say that it's a testament to just how original this game is – after playing a bajillion games you'd think a person like me could figure out any 4 direction, one button game. Not so. And even by today's standards, this is one of the most original games you'll ever play and certainly the only one where I have an actual emotional response to the destruction of my trees.

This isn't a review, but just so you know what it's all about, you are a Druid. Yes, one of those tree-hugging magic-users that most of us learned about while playing Dungeons & Dragons. Your enemy is the title character, the Necromancer. In the game, there are three separate and very diverse stages. In the first,

you will attempt to plant seeds and grow them into trees before the Necromancer's goons kill them off. One of the greatest features here is the transition to the next stage – not only is the skill level of the game determined by how many trees you grow, but you take that exact number of trees with you to the following stage. In stage two, you command your trees to take root over the Necromancer's spider larvae. Once embedded into the ground, they smash through, squashing the larvae. There is a LOT going on in level two. You can still move around as well as move your trees. You can still control your weapon. And there are enemies all over the place as well as bonus items rolling along the floors and down the ladders. If you can make it to the bottom of this level, you take on the boss in a frantic shooting level where you have to destroy headstones as spiders, invincible spiders, and the pesky Necromancer himself bear down on you.

The game was released on disk in 1982 for Atari 8-bit computers (and translated to others, the Commodore 64 among them) and then released again six years later (!) on cartridge for the Atari XE.

Into The Eagle's Nest (Pandora, 1988)

While I had my Atari XE system out I decided to plug in another favorite that hasn't been revisited in 20 years. *Into the Eagle's Nest* was developed by Massachusetts-based Pandora Software. I'd like to say you know Pandora from other games but their only other two games, *Death Bringer* and *Xenomorph*, would probably also appear on a sleeper list. While research-

ing Pandora I discovered that after *Xenomorph* was released in 1990 the company moved in a different direction and throughout the 1990s used their technical prowess to provide database solutions to the health care industry.

This game plays like a cross between *Gauntlet* (with its top-down-in-a-maze-battle style) and *Castle Wolfenstein* (set in a Nazi castle with doors, keys, health packs). It's a great looking game and quite deep for a cartridge-based game. It's also rather tough, but classic gamers are used to this. Seek it out for a really worthwhile challenge.

DIGITAL PRESS FEATURE

"DP INTERVIEWS BALLY/MIDWAY'S BRIAN COLIN"

DP: What's your educational background?

Brian Colin: I discovered an aptitude for filmmaking in High School and I liked making audiences laugh, so I went to Southern Illinois University and majored in Film Production. I found that it was often frustrating to get live-action projects completed due to the inherent unreliability of the average college student, so I fell back on my cartooning skills more and more, and eventually I ended up specializing in Animation.
If you're interested, one of my animated short films "IN SEARCH OF A PLOT" can be viewed at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=riDPA0aULZs

DP: What inspired you to go into game design?

Brian Colin: Self defense. No, really! I'm pretty much a results-oriented kinda guy, (i.e., "Lead, follow or get out of the way"), and one of the first things you discover about the game development process is that poorly designed projects are a nightmare to work on, whereas, if someone makes an attempt to do a bit of pre-planning, the process is usually much, much more enjoyable. I joined the industry as an animator, but I became a designer because there was a shortage of people willing to step up and assume responsibility.

Also, in the early years, it was no one's job to be a designer. You were an artist, programmer, mechanical engineer or whatever, and the path that the game development took was often nothing more than trial and error. As far as management was concerned, there was no need for a "designer"... if we all simply did our job, the game would get done eventually, right? Moreover, identifying and acknowledging individual contribution allows for the possibility that those persons could be recruited by the competition, so it was something management avoided for as long as possible. It was several years before the role of "game designer" was a part of the corporate lexicon.

DP: Were there any artists or games that inspired you?

Brian Colin: Artists….Jack Davis, Dave Stephens, Frank Frazetta, Richard Corben, Robert Crumb. Games…. not initially. Remember, I got into the industry in 1982, working for Bally/

Midway, so I was only peripherally aware of video games. I generally thought of them as a way to waste time while waiting for a table to free up.

DP: And how/when did the association with Bally/Midway come about?

Brian Colin: I produced some animated films in college that won a number of international awards, so I pretty much always assumed that I'd become a film animator...right up until I discovered just how mind-numbingly tedious an entry-level film animation job could be. I worked for a couple of years after college as a freelance cartoonist, until I answered an ad for an animator placed by Bally/Midway in Franklin Park, Illinois in July of 1982. Just to show you how clueless I was, I answered the ad thinking that since Bally made pinball machines, they must be looking for someone to paint pinball marquee glass (i.e., utilizing my animation cel painting techniques).

Turns out they were looking for someone to help them improve the animation in their video games. Which I didn't find all that appealing, since what little I'd seen of the state of the art in 1982 had me suspecting that it was no place for an animated filmmaker. But their initial offer was far more than I was making on my own, so I reluctantly took the job; convinced that, for me, childhood was officially over. I was wrong. (For the record, designing videogames is quite possibly the best way to prolong one's childhood.)

DP: Have you worked with Jeff Nauman from the start?

Brian Colin: He started before I did, and all the artists worked on pretty much everything, so "yes" I technically worked with him from my earliest days at Bally. But in terms of really working together, we really didn't do much day-to-day collaborating until later, with games like *Demolition Derby, Sarge*, and *Rampage*.

DP: This is probably a very simplistic description of your responsibilities, but is it safe to assume that you both are involved with game design, but your focus is on art (graphics) and Jeff's is with programming?

Brian Colin: Very simplistic, and as it happens, dead-on-balls-accurate (an industry term).

DP: What was the development process like, as far as what hours/schedule you typically worked, the equipment/tools used, etc.?

Brian Colin: The problem with that question is the use of the word "typically". I've worked on close to 50 titles over the past 26 years, and very little is ever typical.

Moreover, since I've been doing this for so long I've worked with everything from 10-inch floppies, 40 MB hard drives the size of automatic dishwashers and proprietary hardware systems with bowling ball sized trackballs and thumbwheels ... to 3DS Max on lightning fast laptops running third party game engines. Millions of colors and gigs of memory are taken for granted these days, but the majority of my early arcade games had 64 available* colors, 256 32x32 pixel foreground sprites, and 512 8x8 background sprites. The only reliable tool set that's stayed the same over the years is a #2 lead pencil and a blank sheet of paper.

*Tangentially-related Historical Anecdote: I was told that an early Bally/Midway manager/programmer who shall remain nameless insisted on keeping 3 out of the 4 available 16-color palettes "a secret" from the Artists because, "...why would anyone need more than 16 colors?" Don't know if this story's really true, but I tend to believe it.

Having said the above, I typically start designing my next game while finishing the previous one. I always create some kind of design document that's used to convey the game's key points to others. This may be anything from sketches on the back of a cocktail napkin to a 90-page document complete with storyboards and animated demos. The early months are all about providing the programmer(s) with everything needed to prove out the concept, and the excitement of doing something new means that you are usually spending more time working than sleeping. The final months of any project are all about squeezing in all of the extra stuff you came up with along the way and getting rid of the bugs and testing/evaluating the game and making sure you hit the dates on the production schedule... so, yeah, you pretty don't get any sleep then either.

"Typical" typically changed from workplace to workplace as well.

For the most part, "typical" at Bally/Midway was everyone working on everything. Programmers swapped code, shared tricks, and discussed strategies. Artists contributed to every project in one capacity or another, borrowed techniques, and volunteered expertise whenever it was called for. Everyone played everyone else's games pretty much every day, and everyone exchanged ideas. It was a very experimental, organic, "all-for-one, one-for all" atmosphere with a tremendous amount of creative freedom.

My perception regarding what was "typical" dramatically changed after Williams Electronics bought Bally/Midway in 1988. Jeff Nauman and I were the only two video game designers to survive the transition, and we found ourselves in a very different kind of development environment. Competition between development teams was encouraged, and as a result it was not uncommon to ask the same question of three different people and get three completely different answers.

Even after forming our own company, Game Refuge in 1992, "typical" remained an elusive concept. We've done home console games, coin-op arcade games, touchscreen games, slot machines, poker machines, redemption machines, PC games, Advergames, licensed games, original games. and even an experimental patent prototype or two and about the only thing that stays the same is our love of a challenge and a genuine commitment to the project, whatever that project might be.

DP: Were the titles you worked on assigned, or chosen by yourself?

Brian Colin: As noted elsewhere, artists could pretty much work on anything & everything. Discs of Tron was, of course, "assigned", being my first game in the industry. Everything else was either something I offered to help with, something I helped conceive in the first place, or, in the case of most Game Refuge Projects, something that someone hired GRI to do.

DP: Were you involved with the home versions of any of your games, up to this time?

Brian Colin: As noted elsewhere, the fun for us is designing something new. Doing home versions of something we've already done doesn't typically offer much of a design challenge, so we tend to pass on them.

DP: From your Web site, you've worked with several clients on products for both the home and arcade. Besides *General Chaos* (for the Sega Genesis), what other home titles were you involved with? What of 'home exclusive'

sequels, such as *Rampage 2: Universal Tour*, or non-video games such as the *Spy Hunter* pinball machine?

Brian Colin: After the success of *RWT* on the home side, Midway Home Entertainment asked us if we'd consider doing another *Rampage* title specifically for the home market. I used a third-party 3D engine to mock up a playable demo of a really cool, dramatically different 3D *Rampage*, but was told that they were, "...not looking for anything that ambitious". Instead, they asked if we would simply add a new character or two to the existing game. The thought of doing the same game with minimal changes didn't really have much appeal for us, so we took a pass.

DP: Occasionally, programmers would put little "Easter eggs" in some of their games that would reveal their name or a message. I know of one with *Arch Rivals*, where you can pull your opponent's shorts down. Do you recall any fellow co-workers that did?

Brian Colin: Not really. We put a secret dipswitch setting in *Sarge* that would cause the cute blonde GI to appear topless when you hit a certain point level, but we took it out of the production units.

DP: Both yourself and Jeff recently auctioned off several arcade machines from your collection. Up until then, have either of you kept a copy of everything that you've worked on?

Brian Colin: Not everything... the early years we built games out of spare parts from prototype or test cabinets, in later years we made free Production Units a standard part of our contracts with employers and clients alike.

DP: Which of your titles are your favorite, and what types of games in general?

Brian Colin: My Favorites to Play...
Arctic Stud is my favorite PC game; I've been playing online almost every day for the past 15 months. I love PC LAN shooters games in general, and the added cerebral element keeps it fresh. *Pigskin* is probably my favorite of our head to head games, and *Zwackery* is probably my favorite of our 1p games.

My Favorites for personal reasons...
Of course, *Rampage*, *RWT*, and *General Chaos* will always be my favorite success stories. Fans still approach me to this day with kind words and enthusiastic kudos, and it's always a great feeling and a bit of a surprise.

DP: Have you stayed in touch with any of your former co-workers from your days at Bally/Midway?

Brian Colin: I'm currently working with Ken Fedesna, Jack Haegar, Cary Mednick, Pat Cox,

Frank and Eddie Pellegrini and, of course, Jeff Nauman.

DP: What are your thoughts on how the industry has evolved?

Brian Colin: Don't ask; I'm no good at understanding "industry". I predicted that BETA would beat out VHS; that no one would pay for Cable TV when they could get broadcast for free; and that the Internet was just a fad.

BRIAN COLIN SOFTWAREOLOGY

ARCADE
Kozmik Krooz'r (Bally/Midway 1982)
Discs of Tron (Bally/Midway 1983)
Spy Hunter (Bally/Midway 1983)
Zwackery (Bally/Midway 1984)
Demolition Derby (Bally/Midway 1984)
Jump Shot (Bally/Midway 1985) – upgrade for Pac-Man boards
Sarge (Bally/Midway 1985)
Shoot the Bull (Bally/Midway 1985) – upgrade for Pac-Man boards
Max RPM (Bally/Midway 1986)
Rampage (Bally/Midway 1986)
Spy Hunter II (Bally/Midway 1987)
Xenophobe (Bally/Midway 1987)
Team Laser prototype (later became Blasted)
Blasted (Bally/Midway 1988)
Arch Rivals (Bally/Midway 1989)
Pigskin 621 A.D. – Ancient Archrivals on a Rampage (Bally/Midway 1990)
Rampage World Tour (Midway Games 1997)
Star Trek Voyager: The Arcade Game (Team Play 2002)
Cow Tipping (Team Play 2004)
Antraid (not released)
P'Tooie Louie (not released)
The Spectre Files (not released)
Wild Pitch (not released)

CASINO
The Munsters (IGT games)
Censored Bloopers
Deep Pockets
Instant Bingo
Money Storm
Tailgate Party
The Honeymooners

Monopoly Grand Hotel (WMS Gaming games)
Match Game
Alfred Hitchcock
Monopoly Own It All
The Great Cheese Caper

MERIT MEGATOUCH
Air Shot
Goooal
Puch Shot
Tennis Ace

TOUCHTUNES GamesStudio "PLAYPORTT" games (2008)
Shuff o Bowl
Bag Toss
Fishin' Hole
Cap'n Zack
Bobblehead Baseball
Ballbuster

GENESIS
General Chaos (1994 EA)

PC
Artic Stud Poker Run
Deliverance
The Komatsu Challenge
The Komatsu Challenge 2008
Rescue Riders

Arcade Redemption Games
Countdown
Line It Up
Match It
Win A Prize

QUARTERS AND TOKENS

"THE GAMES OF SILVER SPOONS"

Ask anyone who's got a collection of arcade games in their house why they collect the games, and there's a 33% chance that you'll get some variation of this response: "because the mansion in Silver Spoons had arcade games in the living room."

I'd wager that anyone who watched Silver Spoons during its original run but hasn't seen it since could give you the name of at least one arcade game that was on the set. In fact, feel free to pause here for a moment to name a game before continuing on.

Four arcade video games were installed along the wall of the living room set alongside a single pinball machine. That's right, four games and a pinball machine. If you saw the show way back then, did you remember the living room as having a lot more than four arcade games? Most people do. The list of games varied a bit, but the initial lineup was, from left to right while facing the wall of games: pinball machine (unknown manufacturer, cabinet is yellow with a roulette wheel on the side), *GORF* (Bally/Midway), *Asteroids* (Atari), *Tempest* (Atari), and *Pac-Man* (Bally/Midway).

The games presumably served the purpose of underscoring Mr. Stratton as an overgrown, mischievous child-in-adult's-clothing who had too much money for his own good. Manufacturers undoubtedly relished the free plugs their games received every week during primetime. Most importantly (and successfully) though, they existed to make kids watching the show say, "totally awesome! I want games in MY house too!"

Asteroids and *Pac-Man* were obvious choices, mega-hits of the day that still garner huge followings in the age of Wii, PS3, and Xbox360. *GORF* was something of a surprise. It had a cult following, but never seriously challenged any of the games in the Space Invaders / Galaga genre. *Tempest* may have been picked because of its radical wedge shaped cabinet and groovy sideart. Most likely though, producers had con-

tacts with Bally and Atari and got two games from each company, one recognizable hit and one product placement "contender."

Asteroids, Tempest, and *GORF* were full-size uprights; the *Pac-Man* machine was the smaller cabaret model. Throughout the first season the games were powered on, and glimpses of each game's attract mode could be seen by starry-eyed gamers who wished someone would just acknowledge the damn things.

Occasionally a game would be acknowledged, but none of the episodes used the games as a central plot device. In one episode, two FBI agents were momentarily distracted by Asteroids. In another, a cameo-ing Gary Coleman remarked, "if this is the living room, I can't wait to see the game room!"

As the first season wore on, the positions of the games and their obvious branding shifted somewhat. In episode 6, "Evelyn Returns," the *Pac-Man* marquee was covered up. Starting with episode 7, "The Great Computer Caper," (featuring Gary Coleman as Arnold Jackson in a shameless Diff'rent Strokes crossover), *Tempest* switched places with *Asteroids*. At the same time, the marquees for *Asteroids* and *Pac-Man* were covered up with fictitious marquees. *Asteroids* became "Swamp Wars" and *Pac-Man* sported a picture of a Dragon that looked suspiciously like the Izod logo.

The reasons for the voiding of the marquees are unknown, but one might guess that they were removed over some advertising squabble. Another less likely possibility could be

that parent groups were up in arms over the "bad influence" of games like *Pac-Man* and *Asteroids* (speaking of Arnold Jackson, remember his school-skipping addiction to "Space Sucka"?), and they complained until the producers removed the corrupting influence of the game names and artwork.

Whatever the rationale, by season 2, episode 6, "Driver Ed," the *Asteroids* marquee no longer hid behind its absurd Swamp Wars disguise. *Pac-Man* disappeared completely to make room for a new arcade game sensation: *Dragon's Lair* (Cinematronics). By this point in the series, arcade row boasted (still from L-R) a red pinball machine with flames on the sides of the cabinet, *Asteroids, GORF, Dragon's Lair,* and *Tempest*.

By season four, all the arcade games were gone, but not forgotten by kids who grew up wanting to have arcade games in their own homes. I'd wager that anyone who watched Silver Spoons during its original run but hasn't seen it since couldn't tell you the name of any of Ricky's friends. That pretty much sums up Silver Spoons: forgettable show, unforgettable arcade.

BARGAIN BIN BLISS

"MORE GAME FOR LESS MONEY"

Video game buyers and collectors may have different passions and different foci, but we all have one underlying philosophy: More game for less money. Today's gamer has it good, what with two or three used game stores within the town he or she lives in. However, "cheap" does not necessary equal "good." That's where this column comes in.

The underlying theme of Bargain Bin Bliss is to find those "good-n-cheap" games buried and forgotten in the slushpile. Those games chosen must meet four strict criteria:
• The game must be available for less than $8.00 at any typical used video game store. (Why not $10 even? Because $9.99 seems to be a popular price point where many, many used games are found. Finding good games for LESS than that? Those are the true nuggets we're looking for.)
• The game must be somewhat under the radar, having received very little to no advertising or publicity. The used game must be priced to move not because there's so many of them being traded in, but rather because no one's ever heard of it.
• Even if it's not particularly groundbreaking, the game should bring something new to the genre it represents. No sense recommending the same old, same old.
• I gotta like it.

Stolen – **2005**
PlayStation 2, Xbox, PC
Hip Games
Stealth Adventure

The stealth genre is usually equated with the *Metal Gear Solid* series that made it popular. But when you think of "stealth," you're usually thinking "thief" rather than "commando." Although the *Thief* series put you in the shoes of a ne'er-do-well stalker, it took place in the medieval era. *Stolen* takes place in the here and now, giving your on-screen persona an abundance of high-tech gizmos and gadgets that would make Ethan Hunt jealous.

You play as Anya Romanov, a world-class thief who's chosen her career not for the money, but rather for the challenge of breaking into some of the most secure locations in the world. Decked out in black leather and a a pair of HUD glasses that gives her a readout of her surroundings, Anya finds herself caught up in the middle of a crooked politician's plot.

Storyline aside, the gameplay allows you to perform all of the usual stealth-game related moves – sneak, hide in shadows, subdue guards – but also gives you some nifty gadgets to help you on your way. Hacking into a main-frame with a code descrambler or examining the next room using an echo locator are just a sample of some of the more high-tech tools you'll get to play with.

Each part of a "job" requires an understanding of your environment and the tools you'll need to succeed. Trying to move through a well-guarded room, picking a key off of one of the moving sentries, unlocking a file cabinet for a necessary document, and leaving the scene - all without being detected - will really test your skills. But if the alarm sounds, all bets are off. Anya's a thief, not a fighter. So stay hidden, stay quiet, stay safe.

The graphics are a bit primitive compared with similar games produced at that time, and the animation is not as smooth, but the game essentially captures that sensation of being someplace you shouldn't be – of being a high-tech thief in way over your head.

Circus Maximus: Chariot Wars – **2002**
PlayStation 2 (UK only), Xbox
Encore Software
Combat Racing

Join the ranks of Spartacus and Ben Hur as you race through the streets of Rome, over the hillsides of Athens, and on the floor of the Colosseum. In *Circus Maximus*, you're at the reins of a horse-drawn cart racing three other gladiators at breakneck speeds for the glory. The vehicles you control really do have a rickety feel to them as they damage easily and tip over just as readily. You'll need to keep your horses under control if you hope to make it to the finish, let alone win.

It wouldn't be gladitorial racing unless some brute was swinging a sword at you! Each chariot is equiped with an armed defender who is there to keep the other charioteers at bay while also taking the occassional swing at the competition. If you thought a combat racer was intense with hood-mounted machine guns blazing at you, you ought to have a minotaur jabbing you with a trident! You can switch your control from driver to defender during the race and the computer's AI will drive/defend for you in your absence. Or, if you have a friend sitting beside you, one can drive while the other attacks the other racers.

The racers in the game are a varied lot with some interesting countries represented. I particularly liked the gladiators from Atlantis and the Amazonian warriors. If you tire of the computer's AI, you can always have three friends join you in a four-way splitscreen winner-takes-all.

The race routes you take can cross cobblestone streets and dirt trails through the Roman Empire or through other historical (and some legendary) locales. While contending with the other drivers, you'll also need to keep your eyes open for obstacles, hidden shortcuts, and spectators who may favor one racer over another (and who just may try to swing the race in their favor).

For those racers who have become bored with monster trucks, sportcars, and motorcycles, I suggest you try the gladitorial racing challenge of *Circus Maximus*. As Caesar would say: "Thumbs up!"

13

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

"BREAK GLASS IN CASE OF EMERGENCY"

The day of the big collection has passed. Ten years ago it was fashionable to own thousands of cartridges and discs, every tabletop one could get one's hands on, and all manner of store displays, posters, marquees, promo items, and doo hickeys. You would strategically recreate a Toys R Us window display in your basement, then take pictures of your man-cave and post a thread on the Digital Press forums with the title "Doodz chexors out mah 733t ROOM OF DOOM!!!!" Ahh, youth.

These days are all about downsizing and cashing out. The economy is bad, we have less leisure time, and we're FINALLY growing up and raising little gamers of our own. Thanks to a new generation of consoles with hard drives and the availability of cheap computers, we now have enough virtual space to store games for a lifetime. Or at least until next Wednesday's XBLA release.

I began the process of "essentializing" about five years ago and am now in possession of a modest, fine-tuned collection consisting of only the games I love to play (with the exception of my Atari collection which I have always considered permanent). At one point I owned about 400 NES games. That's down to about 40. I owned a near complete Sega Saturn collection. That's down to three games. My near complete 3DO collection has been cut in half in less than a year. Now extinct in my collection: Bally Astrocade, Colecovision, Atari 7800, Super Nintendo (!), Atari Jaguar, Sega 32X. Yet somehow, the essentials are not all that remain. A fair number of items seem to have slipped through the cracks. Games I have not played in years. Systems that I would have no logical purpose to plug in to a television. Handheld games that have taken up permanent residence inside a drawer.

Why is this stuff still around? The answer is simple; these are my rainy day items. Sadly, the demands of work, grad school, and fatherhood keep me out of the basement quite a bit. But what if there's a snowstorm? What if I break my leg? What if I spot a VIC-20 at a yard sale?

The following items have survived numerous waves of collection weeding:

Vectrex Multicart
I ordered this cartridge from Sean Kelly shortly after I purchased my Vectrex in 1997. Every commercially released game is included, as well as a smattering of prototypes and homebrews. I still play my Vectrex once or twice a month, but only to play the built-in *MineStorm* game, or whatever homebrew cart I've most recently purchased. The multicart is still hanging out as an historical reference, although a rainy day game of *Scramble* is not out of the question.

Coleco Tabletops
Although all these games are enjoyable, for the last six years they have been used strictly for decorative purposes. These machines were so prohibitively expensive when I was a child, I only knew one person who had one (*Pac Man*, of course). Speaking of Coleco tabletops…

Coleco Perma Power Pack
None of the Coleco tabletops came with electrical adapters or even the inputs with which to use them. Because these machines

ate through 4 C-cell batteries rather quickly, Coleco issued the "Power Pack" so that you could plug your beloved Coleco tabletop into an electrical outlet. The package consists of a "Battery Eliminator", which is an electrical adapter with five different plugs, and four fake batteries which appear to be shielded pieces of metal used to conduct electricity. The Battery Eliminator connects to one of the batteries via a 9-volt terminal. All the tabletop battery covers have a small opening on the edge for the cable to pass through. Presumably the other plugs are compatible with other Coleco toys and could probably be used to power other devices. I have not used this product, probably due to my reluctance to damage one of my tabletops, electrocute myself, and burn my house down. But it's there should I ever wish to do so.

Tele-Games Center
The Tele-Games Center is a big, cheap piece of plastic used to house a Sears Tele-Games system and its components. Yes, the Tele-Games system is the Sears version of the Atari VCS, and yes I have the Sears system in there rather than an Atari system. The case also houses a power adapter, RF switch box, two joysticks, two sets of paddles, two keyboard controllers, one Video Touch Pad (yay *Star Raiders*), and one *Combat* cartridge (although really a *Tank Plus* cartridge would be appropriate). This is truly an emergency system should all my other VCS consoles and controllers fail, or should I need to bring a complete system with me somewhere in a pinch.

Atari Flashback 2

I own this simply because it wouldn't be right for me not to own it. I played this once on day one. Don't get me wrong, it's a superb product. If you're not already an Atari collector, at least have one of these in your collection. For the rest of us, it's a rainy day or travel item.

Software for systems I don't have

What you see here is a big pile of those long VIC-20 cartridges. What you don't see is a VIC-20 computer on which to play them because I don't have one. But I'm keeping the hope alive that someday I will get around to picking up a Vic, and then I'll have a bunch of games to play. Talk about a rainy day!

GameCube and PlayStation consoles

I still have my old GameCube and a couple PSX consoles, even though my games are perfectly playable on the Wii/PS2/PS3. Why? Well at some point I may want to play my PLAYSTATION games on a PLAYSTATION, no? Maybe recreate 1998 or something? Maybe? Maybe not? Probably not.

Various Handhelds and Plug n Plays

Soon, the day will come. I'll be on my way to the Motor Vehicles Commission for some serious waiting in line. My DS won't be charged. My Game Boy Advance will be missing. My PSP will be at my buddy's house. What to do? I know….time to open up that big ol' drawer of handhelds I haven't played in ten years! Hello *Merlin*! Hello *Football 2*! Hello *Yahtzee*! And if all 19 of my consoles happen to break down, there's my Plug n Play Frogger! Whoopee!

Controllers

I just don't know what I need these controllers for. I'm not even sure what some of these things *do*. And check out that PlayStation joystick. Why is that still around?

Gifts

Here we are, at what has to be the bottom of every collector's barrel this side of the trade box. My wife bought me the PS2 version of *The Scorpion King* one day when she was mad at me. I've kept that sealed in mint condition. My mother bought me *Soul Calibur 2* because she thought it would be neat to buy me a game just like when I was ten. There's that launch Dreamcast I got for my birthday. My sister always wants to play that GameCube *Karaoke Revolution* she bought me for Christmas one year. And let's not forget my inheritance from Uncle Johnny; a shoebox full of dirty VCS commons. Isn't that GCE calculator game wicked though? Too bad my brother said "You can't eBay this" when he picked it up at a flea market for me.

So friends, that's my rainy day stash. Log on to the forums at www.digitpress.com and tell us about yours!

15

RETROCOMPUTING

"EMULATING THE COMMODORE 64"

While demonstrating a Commodore 64 emulator running on a GamePark 32 portable console at the 2006 Oklahoma Videogame Expo (OVGE), one of the teens in front of me rolled his eyes and said, "It's not as good as the real thing."

"That's true," I responded. "Then again, have you ever tried hooking up a real Commodore 64 on an airplane?"

I've always been one to find harmony in things, especially in videogames. I don't support one console manufacturer over another (my PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 and Nintendo Wii sit side-by-side in harmony), I don't think everything Electronic Arts puts out is inherently crap, I understand collecting both sealed and loose games, and I don't think that emulators are universally good or evil. Like any tool, I think they have their place.

My retrocomputing machine du jour is the Commodore 64. This month I decided to put my old original beige box up against the latest PC version of WinVice in a head-to-head game-off. WinVice is a free Commodore 64 emulator available for multiple operating systems including DOS, Windows, Macintosh, Amiga, and multiple flavors of Linux. Here's how the two stacked up against one another.

Performance: The heart of the Commodore 64 is the 6510 processor, a modified version of the 6502 that runs at a blinding speed of 1MHz. Any modern machine that measures its speed in gigahertz (a thousand megahertz) should have no problem emulating the Commodore 64 in full speed. WinVice will limit its performance to 100% (full speed of a real C64), but with one keystroke (Alt-W) you can enable Warp Mode, which turns off the limiting and boosts performance (on my machine) up to 8000x faster. This turns those 2+ minute loading times into a fraction of a second. *Performance Winner: WinVice.*

Space: While the Commodore 64 was one of the physically smaller personal comput-

ers from the 1980s, its shape prevents anything from being stacked on top of it. Additionally you'll need some space behind your C64 for things like cartridges and cables, which means you'll need either a deep desk or a hutch to place your monitor on. Commodore floppy disks are about the same size as the computer itself, but at least they're stackable. Add a power supply, multiple boxes of diskettes, and a couple of joysticks to your setup and you'll need some dedicated desk space for that big pile of retro hardware – not to mention a couple of fans. Emulation, on the other hand, takes up no physical space and very little virtual space. Installed, WinVice takes up just over 10 megabytes, and virtual disk images are 180k each. *Space Winner: WinVice.*

Cost: Another blowout. The going rate for a working Commodore 64 with disk drive and monitor is $50, give or take. Additionally you're going to need some games (which means floppy disks or cartridges), some flavor of fast load cartridge (to escape from slow-loading Commodore hell), joysticks, and other accessories. From a financial standpoint, there's no comparison. WinVice is free, and C64 disk images can be found splattered across the Internet for the same price. *Cost Winner: WinVice.*

Convenience and Ease of Use: While your gut instinct might be to state the obvious – emulation is easier and more convenient – both WinVice and real Commodores have associated learning curves. The default command for loading a disk's directory on a C64 is LOAD"$",8. Cartridges like Epyx's FastLoad replace that line with a single "$" (some other cartridges relocate the most common operating system into the machine's function keys). For the most part, disk commands have been replaced with mouse clicks in WinVice, so I have to give it the upper hand. However, as with any Windows program, you still have to learn the commands associated with the

program. While running WinVice I found myself regularly hitting ALT-W to toggle warp speed, ALT-J to swap my joystick between virtual Commodore ports, and ALT-C to capture a screen snapshot. Fortunately most of these commands are accessible through drop-down menus. Ultimately I think WinVice is a little easier to use, but I did want to note that both solutions will require a bit of learning. *Convenience and Ease of Use Winner: WinVice.*

(One notable exception to the above are the emulators available for portable systems. Frodo for the GP32 does not run at full speed, and uses multiple buttons and short cuts to help users load games. The Nintendo DS release of Frodo is abysmal as it forces users to peck out real C64 commands on a virtual touch screen version of the Commodore keyboard using the stylus. It takes a lot of work to take the fun out of Commodore games, but the DS port of Frodo manages it.)

Features: There are a lot of neat things coming out for real Commodores right now. Devices like the 1541-III and the 1541 Ultimate allow owners to play games directly from D64 image files (so does WinVice). With the right software and the right cables, you can connect your C64 to your PC and use its hard drive for storage (WinVice does that, by default). It could be argued that with a real 1541 Ultimate you can convert Commodore diskettes to D64 images (and back), but this can also be done on a PC with the use of an x1541 cable and a real 1541 (the 1541 Ultimate method is easier and faster, hands down). Both emulation and WinVice offer some neat features. But again, WinVice delivers additional features such as screenshots,

snapshots (save states), video recording and playback, netplay, and a million configurable options, and WinVice once again pulls ahead. *Features Winner: WinVice.*

Software/Accuracy: Here's one category where a real C64 shines. The Commodore 64 is, of course, 100% compatible. WinVice is less. The 6502 had tons of undocumented tricks that programmers are still using to push the Commodore to its limits, and sometimes those tricks don't translate well over to emulation. As a result, some of the video modes used in games and demos may not look quite right in WinVice. The sound emulation, while close, isn't perfect either. If you demand accuracy, the only way to get it is with a real machine. *Software/ Accuracy Winner: Commodore.*

Interface: Here's another category where the real thing is better. A Commodore 64 keyboard is laid out differently than a PC keyboard. As a result, the keys you hit in WinVice aren't what you'll see on the screen. For example, to type a quotation mark on a real Commodore you press Shift-2, so that's how you type one in WinVice, too. Even after pounding on a real C64 keyboard for 25 years I still have problems finding keys in WinVice from time to time (CAPS LOCK becomes the C64's RESTORE key). And unless you own a Stelladaptor or another way of connecting an Atari-style joystick into your PC, you'll be playing Commodore games with a modern PC joystick or the keyboard, neither of which feels authentic. *Interface Winner: Commodore.*

As you can see, there's no clear-cut winner when it comes to a battle between emulation and the real deal. If you've got the space, the money, and the patience to get a real Commodore system up and running, that's great. If you don't, or if you do a lot of gaming on the go, emulation is probably the solution for you. Either way, don't let those console gamers have all the fun – computer games need love too!

DIGITAL PRESS FEATURE

"CGE 2007 DVD PREVIEW"

A year and a half in the making, the Classic Gaming Expo 2007 DVD set is almost ready for the road. As I write this, there are a few things waiting to be ironed out on the artwork side; the video itself, at long last, is done.

Spread over four shiny round things for your viewing pleasure, CGE 2007 on DVD covers every one of the keynote presentations, every moment of the auction, and even the highlights of the alumni dinner. (What was left out of the alumni dinner can basically be boiled down to the sight of your video-game-programming heroes eating. Sadly you'll never know what Intellivision's Keith Robinson

really chows down on when the clock strikes Burgertime.)

Each keynote was shot with two camera angles, and cuts to the best angle to show whoever is speaking. The two-camera approach almost proved to be a hindrance for one keynote: Atari engineer (and *Pong*/2600 designer) Al Alcorn brought a Powerpoint presentation to be projected on a screen behind him, and the bright idea that I could focus one camera on the projector screen simply didn't pan out (which I discovered to my horror upon getting home with the tapes). Fortunately, he allowed us to borrow his Powerpoint presentation so we could show everything with the best image quality possible, so in a way, this wasn't a bad thing.

The legendary, just-shy-of-three-hours CGE auction is easily the highlight of the whole set - it was shot and edited like a live sports event, complete with a somewhat unique "scoreboard" to keep tally of the item up for auction and the high bid. But the auction's unprecedented length also wound up being a bit of a problem - some way into the third hour, I simply ran out of tape on one camera, so the fast-cutting action slows down quite a bit! (As, I think, everyone in the room was slowing down after the adrenaline rush of the two big Vectrex-related auctions passed.)

Each disc features bios of its guest speakers, and the fourth disc features a treasure trove of bonus features from this CGE show and every show past, including the World Of Atari shows. The DVDs' main focus is CGE 2007, but the bonus features are a tribute to the show's entire history.

Watch the Digital Press forums for imminent announcements on ordering the set - it really is, at long last, just around the corner. If the 4-DVD set does well, I may look into a further release of some of the more unique keynotes I captured on tape in 2003 and 2005 (though admittedly probably not 4 discs worth!).

DOUBLE JEOPARDY

"WHERE BAD GAMES GET A SECOND CHANCE"

Galaga: Destination Earth **(PlayStation, Hasbro Interactive, 2000)**

The charge: one of the weakest of the millennial rash of classic updates

When I plucked this one from the shelf of my local classic gaming shoppe, a trio of concerned customers promptly informed me that I was making a mistake. Their warnings didn't surprise me. I could clearly remember I didn't purchase the game when it was released because of poor reviews, even though I was/am a huge fan of the classic arcade game. Even the store's proprietor balked, and I quote: "Dude, don't buy this."

But buy I did, and for a mere $4.99 my mini-collection of barely adequate PlayStation updates of classic arcade games (hello *Robotron X, Asteroids, Q*Bert, Xevious 3D/ G+, Space Invaders,* and *Missile Command*) is now one game richer. Yes, *Galaga: Destination Earth* is guilty of being unfaithful to the original, but it's not nearly "Dude, don't buy this" bad. Frankly, I prefer this game over the more recently released *Galaga Legions*.

Most of *Galaga: Destination Earth* is played from a behind-the-ship 3D perspective, similar to *StarFox*. This perspective is not very Galaga-like, and probably the primary source of gamers' objections. Also, the 3D control isn't very good....actually, the analog control is awful, but control with the d-pad is bearable. There are some parts of the game that are played the normal *Galaga* 2D vertical style and others which are played horizontally. Occasionally you use a mounted gun for some first-person shooter action, which is really pretty surprising and cool. Surprising and not cool = no original *Galaga* on the disc, not even as an unlockable.

Verdict: **not guilty.** *It's not Galaga, but I willingly spent a lot more time with it than I thought I would.*

Star Raiders **(Atari VCS, Atari, 1982)**

The charge: tarnished the legacy of a classic computer game

The computer version of *Star Raiders* was held in such high regard that I was looking forward to a possible VCS release to see what all the fuss was about, although consensus at the time was the 2600 couldn't handle the complex first-person space shooter. When the game showed up in stores in 1982 packing its own Video Touch Pad controller (also sold separately for some reason), it promised a level of sophistication on par with games available for the more powerful systems of the day. Whether or not it lived up to that promise is arguable, but the final outcome was that the game and the *Star Raiders* name were quickly forgotten about, with Atari eventually re-christening the franchise with the Last Starfighter brand. And we all know how that turned out.

I suspect *Star Raiders* didn't meet Atari's sales goals as mint-in-box specimens are widely available. I tore into one of these with some trepidation as I wasn't thrilled with the prospect of having to actually read an instruction manual. I was pleased to find the manual was not especially large or deep. I was not pleased to find that the Video Touch Pad has a 24 inch cord, nor that only five of its 12 buttons are used in the game. Atari could have easily used the existing keypad controller.

The game primarily has two parts; the outer space fighting part controlled with the joystick, and the resource management part controlled with the Video Touch Pad. The Video Touch Pad part of the game is okay, although it could have been controlled just as easily by manipulating the difficulty switches and/or the second joystick. The problem lies in the control of your star fighter, which is unresponsive to an irritating degree. It's like flying a bus in outer space. Some of those Video Touch Pad buttons could have been used to give your slow moving ship a little better firepower, but then again, the controller's cord is so short it's really a struggle to get a grip on it in the heat of battle.

Verdict: **guilty.** *Controller hell times two.*

BMX XXX **(Gamecube, Acclaim, 2002)**

The charge: weak BMX game hiding behind crude humor and cut-scenes of strippers

To this day I don't understand what happened between Dave Mirra and Acclaim. The first two Dave Mirra BMX games were generally favorably received, and were at least popular enough to warrant a third game. It's rumored that the third game was coming along poorly, and therefore the "XXX" portions of the game were created to compensate for Dave Mirra 3's shortcomings. I find this explanation difficult to believe.

For starters, *BMX XXX* is a pretty good game. The levels are well designed and invite heavy exploration and experimentation, two of the cornerstones of games of this kind. Graphically it is the best of the series; on the GameCube *BMX XXX* has a brightly colorful, almost cel-shaded look, and an impressive draw distance. Control is slightly improved over the second game (it's not Acclaim's fault that the Wavebird has a lousy d-pad).

The game's primary flaw, and it is a big one, is that it is simply too difficult. Too often the player is sent off to complete objectives without a clue as to which direction to go. A map would have helped greatly, or at least a traditional two-minute clock to complete the objectives. I searched online for a strategy guide to no avail. That I cared enough to look should tell you something.

As for the "XXX" business, it's obvious to me that all that stuff...the character models, the cut-scenes, the environments...could not have possibly been added post production. For better or worse, the "adult" content is organic to the game. I wonder why Acclaim would develop an entire game in this fashion without the consent of Mirra. I also wonder why everyone turned their noses up at this game, while the adult humor in *Conker's Bad Fur Day* was so well received.

Verdict: **not guilty.** *Trade a map for the unnecessary "XXX" content and you'd have the best BMX game yet.*

MATTERS OF IMPORT

"AN OVERVIEW OF CLASSIC IMPORTS FOR THE NES"

In the late '80s and most of the '90s, several mainstream gaming magazines had sections devoted to promising import titles. U.S. gamers were given tantalizing glimpses of some of the finest games Japan had to offer thanks to these articles, but more often than not would be left wondering what happened to these titles when they never materialized on store shelves. For years the Nintendo Entertainment System was the biggest console in the U.S., so naturally games for its Japanese counterpart, the Famicom, were some of the first imports covered.

One of the first Famicom games to receive major coverage was Konami's *Gradius II*, released in 1988. EGM and GamePro both sang the praises of this phenomenal title, GamePro even going as far as to make it the cover story of their second issue. *Gradius II* pushed the aging 8-bit hardware to its limits with crystal clear voice samples, massive stages, and gigantic bosses among the highlights. A U.S. release seemed certain, but for reasons unknown *Gradius II* remained in Japan. Perhaps Konami thought that it wouldn't sell well in the U.S. Whatever the reasoning was, it remained in Japan, much to the dismay of American *Gradius* fans.

One title that got virtually no coverage by the U.S. press was Namco's super-deformed take on Splatterhouse, *Splatterhouse: Wanpaku Graffiti* (released in 1989). I only saw mention of it once myself; it was buried in a list of Famicom titles for sale by the Ultimate Gaming Club back in '91. It wasn't until the advent of the internet that *Wanpaku Graffiti* got any exposure outside of its native Japan. It's possible Namco never even submitted the game to any U.S. publishers for a possible release; in spite of its super-deformed (and as a result, super-cute) characters, there was still plenty of gore present. It's also unlikely that Nintendo would have allowed an NES game with so many religious references to be released.

Crisis Force was an overhead shooter that was developed by Konami and released in 1991, toward the end of the Famicom's life. The EGM-published magazine Super Play reviewed it and did a nice two page article devoted to it - giving it a well deserved high score in the process - but that seemed to be as much exposure as it was going to be given by the U.S. press. After all, the NES was being replaced by the SNES at the time, and 8-bit games that wouldn't be seeing a US release weren't going to be given extensive coverage.

In an odd reversal, some games developed for them Famicom never saw the light of day in Japan, but were released for the NES. One of the most puzzling was *Strider*, released by Capcom for the NES in 1989. It was based on a manga that was never released outside of Japan, so why the companion game would never be released in the country it was intended to be is truly baffling. If you're interested in checking out the manga, just head to the Light Sword Cypher Mainframe (http://www.lscmainframe.net/) and take a look at it. Even untranslated, the plot makes more sense than the game's bizarre Engrish translation.

Two other notable games were Bandai's *Monster Party* and Konami's *Contra Force*. A *Monster Party* prototype surfaced in a Japanese magazine years ago, but the game itself never appeared on Japanese shelves. It's hard

to see why, as the final American game is loaded with all sorts of wacky Japanese humor, and the few prototype screenshots that exist show an even wackier game.
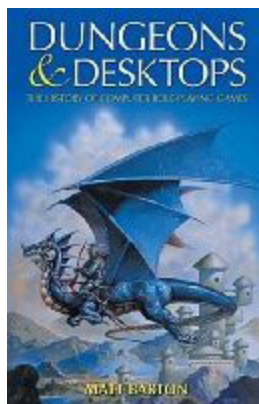

CONTRA FORCE

Contra Force is one of the black sheep of the *Contra* line, as it's nowhere near as good as the other 8-bit Contras. That's easily explained once you know about its history; it's not a *Contra* title. It was slated to be released in Japan under the title *Arc Hound* - even appearing in a Konami Famicom brochure under that name - but was cancelled. Yet for some reason Konami of America decided to release it here, passing over other titles like *Crisis Force* in the process. Most likely they noticed *Arc Hound*'s similarity to *Contra*, and knowing of *Contra*'s popularity in the US, thought it would be welcomed by U.S. *Contra* fans with open arms. Maybe they were just hoping to make a quick buck with a popular name? Who knows?

GRADIUS 2

SARAH SZEFER

EIGHT BIT LIT

"A REVIEW OF MATT BARTON'S *DUNGEONS & DESKTOPS: THE HISTORY OF COMPUTER ROLE-PLAYING GAMES***"**

*D*ungeons & Desktops is a comprehensive history of computer role-playing games (CRPGs) from the early days to today. Matt Barton leaves no stone unturned as he explores the evolution of the genre by playing each of the games covered. Whenever possible, he includes some background information about the games through quotations from their creators or vintage reviews. The book is richly illustrated with screen captures; aside from a few glossy color pages, most are in black and white and included within the text.

Historical eras inspired Barton for dividing the history of CRPGs. According to him, classics like Richard Garriott's early *Ultima* games fall under the Silver Age era, while more recent gems such as *Morrowind* and *Diablo* belong to the Platinum Age. Barton points out that *Ultima* has inspired Japanese game developers who, through their console RPG classics, have in turn inspired Western games over the past twenty years. This mutual influence is the reason why he included descriptions of four major JRPG series: *The Legend of Zelda, Phantasy Star, Final Fantasy*, and *Dragon Quest*. He also explores the future of CRPGs in comparison to their console brethren and primarily to MMORPGs like *World of Warcraft*. On this topic, he remains confident that CRPGs will continue to captivate gamers, provided that the focus remains on the storyline and on turn-based combat rather than on hack 'n slash mechanics.

This book is a good source of information and can inspire many a retrogamer to seek out older RPGs. It would be challenging for most people to run such games on their computer, but the emulation route seems the simplest (early Windows 95 and Windows 3.1 titles are the most problematic).

Dungeons & Desktops is probably based on a college lecture given by Barton in the English classes he teaches, as evidenced by his use of expressions like "As we will see later". This gives the book the feel of a transcribed oral history of games, instead of the usual journalist-penned gaming history books. The transitional sentences could have been left out of the final version, but it still remains a good read.

-Barton, Matt. *Dungeons & Desktops*. AK Peters, 2008.

CHRIS CHANDLER

EVENT HORIZONS

"AN INSIDER'S REPORT FROM THE LATEST CLASSIC GAMING EVENTS"

Event: Too Many Games
Date: October 18, 2008
Location: Greater Reading Expo Center in Reading, Pennsylvania

Too Many Games is a growing event, and having served up a relatively large gathering just this past May, a frequent one. This time the organizers opted for a Saturday event rather than a Sunday as they have done in the past. Although this was an issue for some people, I support this change. The show was held in the larger portion of the Expo Center allowing for more vendors and leaving more space to walk around and play. Speaking of vendors, there were the usual mainstays like Mad Gear and Next Level Videogames, and also many more I hadn't seen at previous shows. One in particular, Wizzywig, had all kinds of plushes and figures from Japan featuring characters from Kirby, Mario, and Sonic.

Tons of video games and memorabilia from Atari to Playstation 3 were available for purchase at very reasonable prices. I managed to snag three arcade marquees for my game room for a paltry $21.00, as well as a giant stuffed Super Mushroom purchased at the aforementioned Wizzywig for $8.00. Collectors had many things to see at the show including imports, complete in box RPGs, and even a gray Nintendo World Championship cartridge that was on display. Classic and modern game stations were set up so attendees could sample classics and participate in any of the numerous tournaments being held for games such as *Fatal Fury* and *Guitar Hero*.

The only downsides to the show were the attendance being a little lower than last year, and the lack of arcade cabinets. If I had to choose to remove one thing from the show it would be the bands, even though they were in a different room. The DJ that plays the remixed video game music is much better in my opinion.

Overall, I had a great time at Too Many Games. This show impresses me more each time I attend. It reminds me of the Philly Classic days, and in my opinion is the only show of its kind on the East Coast. No glamorous E3 type of show here, this one is strictly for collectors and video game aficionados alike. You can find out more information about upcoming shows at http://www.toomanygames.com.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

"WHAT TO PLAY"

Jeff Belmonte recommends:

Wipeout HD (PS3, Sony, 2008)
Even if I didn't think *Wipeout HD* was the best game in the series, I would still want it on my hard drive as a reference quality audio/visual experience. Don't mistake this for "just a $20 download"; it's far superior to any full-priced PS3 disc I've played all year. Have fun creating that custom soundtrack.

Robocop vs. Terminator (Genesis, Virgin, 1994)
Although I liked the look and feel of the *Robocop* arcade game, I found the left-to-right gameplay got old quickly. I ignored *Robocop vs. Terminator* for many years thinking it was just another one of those *Robocop* games, which was a mistake. The weapons and gore do justice to both titular characters, and it's a mighty fun platformer to boot.

Skydiver (Atari, 1978)
It has been brought to my attention that many of our young people have never played this simple yet addicting classic arcade game. This situation should be corrected as soon as possible. If you are not able to locate the original arcade machine with the nifty rip-cord controller, it's time to MAME it up, or track down the passable VCS version if you must.

Dave Giarrusso recommends:

Space Invaders Extreme (DS, Taito, 2008)
SIE handily beat out all competitors this year for the coveted title of "most hours logged on a current gen game by me." On the 30th anniversary of the arcade original, SIE still features the player versus rows of marching invaders, but with all sorts of new twists. Classic updates often land on the wrong side of the "hit-or-miss" fence, but this incarnation manages to do everything really, really right.

Power Stone 2 (Dreamcast, Capcom, 2000)
The most fun and playable fighting game of all time. *Power Stone 2* succeeds where so many other clones (e.g., the vastly overrated Smash Bros. series) and other fighting games fail: even with all of its subtlety and depth, anyone can pick it up and play, and anyone can win. With 2, 3, or 4-player simultaneous fighting, gamers can easily kill an entire weekend with this oft overlooked title.

Pepper II (Arcade, Exidy, 1982)
To compare Pepper II with Amidar or Qix is to miss the point of all three games. Superficially they're of similar ilk, but a gamer who actually spends any amount of time with each title can quickly point out that any similarity ends on that level. *Pepper II*'s lightning fast gameplay is supported by excellent sounds and an excellent soundtrack (not the same thing). Coupled with cutesy, brightly colored graphics, Exidy had a big winner on its hands that got lost in the shuffle. Luckily Coleco snapped up the home rights - if you can't find the arcade game the CV cart is an excellent port.

Rob Strangman recommends:

Nightshade (PS2, Sega, 2004)
The successor to the brutally hard PS2 *Shinobi*, *Nightshade* refines the formula nicely while at the same time managing to capture the feel of the classic Genesis *Shinobi* titles. This was pretty much overlooked by the gaming community at large, and can be had for next to nothing nowadays. And hey, your sword doesn't try to kill you in this one.

Run Saber (SNES, Atlus/Hori Electric Co. Ltd., 1993)
Strider never made it to the SNES, but for those SNES owners craving *Strider* action, you can't go wrong with *Run Saber*. It came and went without much fanfare, but is worth checking out. It even has a few neat tricks that *Strider* didn't have, as well as some interesting use of Mode 7 during the game. It's on the easy side, but it's a fun ride.
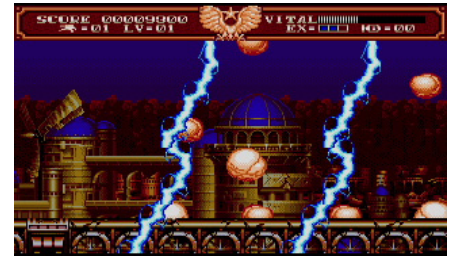
Haunted House (Atari VCS, Atari, 1981)
One of the first adventure games for the VCS, *Haunted House* can be quite the challenge. Try to reassemble the Urn while avoiding the ghost of Old Man Graves and his pet vampire bat & tarantulas... in the dark... and you can only carry one item at a time... and some doors are locked. You'll find yourself going through all nine of your lives pretty quickly. It's quite the experience, and one that has never quite been duplicated.

Paul Z. Cortez recommends:

Lunar Lander (Arcade/MAME, 1979)
Where a lot of games reward quick reflexes and the ability to rapidly hit complex button combinations, *Lunar Lander* stands apart in that the keys to the successful game are a soft touch on the controls and patience despite the high pressure to land safely on a pad. It's a completely different philosophy to playing video games and still stands out as a challenge nearly thirty years after its inception.

Steel Empire (Sega Genesis, Flying Edge,1992)
Normally I'm not a fan of horizontal shooters, but this one is quite engaging. Challenging without being too difficult, one must deal with ground-based threats as well as aerial ones from all directions. The "steampunk" aesthetic of the game is unique and the music isn't half bad to listen to either.

Stubbs the Zombie (XBox, Aspyr, 2005)
Horror game unique in that rather than killing the zombies, you are the zombie. The ability to likewise convert your adversaries and victims into zombies, thereby swelling the ranks of your undead army, can quickly turn the tables your way in what might initially look to be a difficult situation. Lots of humorous dialog along the way helps balance out the somewhat graphic gore with rather pointed jabs satirizing the setting of 1950's America.

Earl Green recommends:

Dodge It (Channel F, Fairchild, 1978)
Why hasn't some iteration of this game been perpetuated on other consoles? It's insanely fun, and a simple test of hand-eye coordination that grows maddeningly unmanageable in very short order. All sadly overlooked just because it's on the Channel F. Give it a shot - it has "great party game" written all over it.
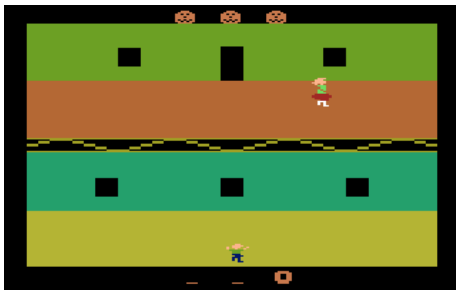
Star Trek: Starfleet Command (PC, Interplay, 1999)
With the new movie just around the corner, are we ever going to get the definitive Star Trek game? Any contenders will have to beat Interplay's *Starfleet Command*, still managing to cling on to the title of best Trek game. It has great graphics, and straddles the fence between complex resource management and real-time strategy very well.

Pac-Man Vs. (Gamecube + GBA, Namco, 2003)
Okay, maybe not really "current-gen", but this is a great reason to keep your Gamecube and GBA around instead of trading them in for a Wii and/or a DS; it means you can play *Pac-Man Vs.*, possibly the best party game of the decade and the most novel twist on Pac-Man in at least that long. The more players, the merrier; fun is just about guaranteed here. This is one case where the underused Gamecube/GBA link-up really hits a home run.

Tim Snider recommends:

Halloween (Atari 2600, Wizard Video, 1983)
The only Atari game that I know of with graphic decapitation as the penalty for failure. I see this game as a forerunner of the "survival horror" genre that actually ratchets up the tension level nicely as you play. When the theme music blares and the killer leaps from a nearby closet, you'll jump just as high as you did when that stupid dog first crashed through the window in Resident Evil.

The Immortal (Sega Genesis, Electronic Arts, 1990)
This is a standard three-quarter dungeon crawl with startlingly graphic kill scenes. A fairly interesting adventure is accompanied by a hauntingly eerie soundtrack and very detailed graphics. Where the game shines though is the many interesting ways you or your enemies

can be dispatched. While the rest of the world was losing their minds by the fatalities of *Mortal Kombat*, I was skullcapping goblins and cleaving them literally from head to toe, wondering why this game's violence was never a blip on the public outrage radar.

Magic Pengel: The Quest for Color (PS2, Agetec, 2002)
The first "draw your creature and it comes to life" game that I remember playing. Like Pokemon where you collect a stable of combatants to do your bidding, YOU actually create the creatures. Although combat is simple (it's only a variation on Rock-Paper-Scissors), the game fascinates me in the way it can take my scribbled doodle and give it motion and a personality.

Kevin Moon recommends:

Speed Freak (Arcade/MAME, 1978)
What do you get when you filter *Hard Drivin'* through the prism of Battlezone's simple but excellent graphical sensibilities? *Speed Freak*, a stripped-down yet elegant driving simulation. The animation is very fluid and smooth, and the gameplay lives up to its name - this game gets fast! But be warned - it's very tough to control and requires a feather touch (use a good analog controller). A forgotten gem and a wonderful example of beautiful vector graphics.

Woody Pop (Sega Mark III, Sega, 1987)
Arkanoid's more organic cousin, *Woody Pop* (in this reviewer's opinion) actually surpasses its progenitor in gameplay and charm (which is saying a lot!). This whimsical clone features Arkanoidian power-ups (slow, catch, enlarge, laser, split, extra ball) while introducing new ones (fireball, diamond ball, jumbo ball, eliminate rear wall, restore rear wall) and new obstacles (toy soldiers and robots, and that blasted choo-choo train!). This game really deserved to be released in the U.S. with the special paddle controller so more people could have enjoyed it; it was import-only, but it's well worth the hunt.

Yoomp! (Atari 8-bit computers, 2007)
A brilliant homebrew and winner of several videogaming awards in 2007. And well-deserved they are—the graphics are gorgeous and the animation is superb! You are in control

of a bouncy ball with a Tempest-eye's view as you travel through colorful, checker-tiled tubes. The concept is simple enough—bounce from tile to tile without falling off, and make it to the end of each tunnel. There are several different kinds of tiles which have different functions, and make darned sure you don't miss the necessary ones you'll need to "yoomp" over those extra-wide spaces!

Sarah Szefer recommends:

Monster Lair (Arcade/TurboGrafx-CD/Wii, Sega/Hudson Soft, 1989)
Originally considered the third arcade *Wonder Boy* game, *Monster Lair* is a little-known platformer/shooter set in the world of *Wonder Boy: Monster Land* and of The Dragon's Trap. Part of the game is reminiscent of the original *Wonder Boy* game – your character must collect fruits to remain healthy – while the shooter section is new to the series. This is an original game that combines two separate genres for more fun! The only North American console version came out on the TurboGrafx-CD (published by Hudson), now also available on the Wii Virtual Console.

Bionic Commando: Elite Forces (Game Boy Color, Nintendo, 2000)
2008 saw the rebirth of Capcom's *Bionic Commando* with a great remake of the NES classic on the PS3 and the Xbox 360. Back in 2000, Nintendo temporarily took over the series and released the second sequel to *Bionic Commando, Elite Forces*. The GBC's limitations gives the game its NES-like charm, and all classic gameplay elements remain intact. However, for the first time, the player can choose the commando's gender. This forgotten gem is a must for fans of the series.

SNK Arcade Classics Vol. 1 (PS2/Wii/PSP, SNK Playmore, 2008)
Sixteen classic Neo-Geo games on one disc: this is the best (legal) way to get so much Neo-Geo goodness for cheap! SNK Playmore avoided the trap of focusing solely on its fighting games by including sports games such as *Baseball Stars 2* and *Neo Turf Masters*, and action games like *Metal Slug* and *Shock Troopers*. Even though there are no substantial bonuses like developer interviews, it remains highly recommended for that nostalgic trip to the early 1990s, when the Neo-Geo ruled the arcade.

Jared Bottorff recommends:

Law Of The West (Commodore 64, Accolade, 1985)
Part interactive fiction, part action game, *Law Of The West* puts you in the role of a gunslinging sheriff making his daily rounds in a small Old West town. You meet various denizens on your journey: shifty scoflaws, barroom madams, and little children just to name a few. Given a choice of different dialogue options, you strike up a conversation with everyone you meet. This allows vast freedom in the way you can approach each citizen. Do you play it calm and collected? Cocky and conceited? Do you go in with guns blazing, asking questions later? Action scenes come in the form of when someone decides to get testy and draw their gun (and even when they don't), so it boils down to a matter of who draws quicker, lives. A complete playthrough only takes about thirty minutes, but the vast replay value will keep you trying to find everything there is to do or say. Fun fact: Pony Canyon developed a Japanese-only port of *Law Of The West* to the NES/Famicom.

Die Hard: Nakatomi Plaza (PC, Sierra, 2002)
There have been several Die Hard games before, but not quite like this; this game recreates the events of the first Die Hard scene by scene, line by line, straight from the movie. What started out as a fanmade total conversion of *Duke Nukem 3D* turned into a standalone, offically licensed first-person shooter running off the Lithtech engine. It's not exactly 100% accurate - some of the actors' likenesses are different, and certain lines have been santinized or changed (strange, considering it doesn't stray from the f-bomb), but for diehard...well, "Die Hard" fans, this game's a real treat. Plus, actor Reginald VelJohnson lends his voice for the role of Officer Powell once more. Yippie-ki-yay.

Creature Crunch (PC, Class6 Interactive, 1996)
This obscure point-and-click adventure has a simple plot: Little Wesley becomes trapped in an evil scientist's basement, gets turned into a monster, and must find a way out of the house. However, the voice acting in this game is provided by Martin Short and Eugene Levy (yes, that Martin Short and Eugene Levy). Despite the game's severe linearity, you'll have fun playing it. Nearly 80% of the objects in the game are only present to provide a quick joke or punchline when clicked on (or twice or thrice). The game's cracked out sense of humor and "click anywhere" aspect of gameplay may remind of people of the Sega CD game *Panic!*, and fans of that will find *Creature Crunch* to be right up their alley.

John Hardie recommends:

Bounty Bob Strikes Back (Atari 8-bit, Big 5 Software, 1984)
Possibly the greatest game of all time! Sequel to *Miner 2049'er*! Platform jumper where you have to fill in all the dirt on the screen while avoiding the radioactive mutants and other hazards. Only this time there are 30 levels of madness and you are able to control the distance of your jump. Awesome intro graphics and a cool as hell high score screen.

Captain Beeble (Atari 8-bit, InHome Software, 1983)
Definitely an overlooked classic! This one plays a lot like *HERO* or should I say *HERO* plays like it since *Capt. Beeble* came first. Navigate through a maze with your jet-pack avoiding radioactive walls and hard as hell to shoot aliens. No static enemies here. Retrieve the crystal and bring it back to the CPU before time and fuel run out. Play it!

Spelunker (Atari 8-bit, Broderbund, 1984)
Another Hit! Guide your spelunker through the maze all the way to the great underground temple where untold treasure awaits. You'll have to deal with plenty of hazards along the way. Use your trusty fan to blow away the ghost, or drop some dynamite to blow that rock out of your way. Absolutely one of the best!

Chris Chandler recommends:

Castlevania II: Belmont's Revenge (Game Boy, Konami, 1991)
This may be the defining platform/adventure game for the Game Boy system. This tiny cartridge has some of the best sound and graphics that the system is able to provide. This game improves on the first *Castlevania* Game Boy effort in all categories. Too bad the successor *Castlevania Legends* didn't meet the high standard of *Belmont's Revenge*. No Game Boy collection is complete without this game.

Drill Dozer (Game Boy Advance, Nintendo, 2006)
I don't understand sometimes why some games that are incredibly good get so overlooked. A first party title developed by Game Freak should have really gotten the attention it deserves. Pushing the Game Boy Advance to its graphical limits, combined with an innovative take on a platformer, makes a great title. The controls are smooth, it sounds great, and the storyline is serviceable. To top it all off, the cart has a bullt-in rumble feature to add another element to the gameplay. *Drill Dozer* would have done ten times better if a traditional Nintendo mascot was involved. "Diddy Kong's Drill Dozer anyone?"

Contact (Nintendo DS, Atlus, 2006) - An action/RPG presented in the likes of Square's "Mana" series, this game is a sleeper waiting to be discovered. *Contact* utilizes the DS touchscreen only when it needs to, not detracting but always adding to the gameplay. The quirkiness of the dialogue, and being able to break the 4th wall are all great reasons to pick this title up, but the best reason is that it does the adventure element of the game well and never seems to go stale.

Joe Santulli recommends:

Kung Fu Panda (Activision, Xbox 360, 2008)
You weren't expecting a "kid's game" here, were you? Well guess what? I've never seen the movie and expected the game to be pretty mediocre but it's actually a really FUN beat 'em up with adjustable skill levels and a story you might actually care about. A big surprise for me.

Poy Poy (PlayStation, Sony, 1997)
It's a little hard to find these days but one of the best four-player "party games" you'll ever find. A four-way free-for-all with hurlable items (including other players) and power-ups.

Mountain King (Atari VCS, CBS, 1983)
I recently picked this up to play again and it's just as hard as ever, but it's also so much fun to play. The music that plays as you try to get the crown to the top of the mountain ("In the Hall of The Mountain King") is the best I've ever heard on the 2600 and perfectly builds the tension which I inevitably fail at ending successfully.

Scott Stilphen recommends:

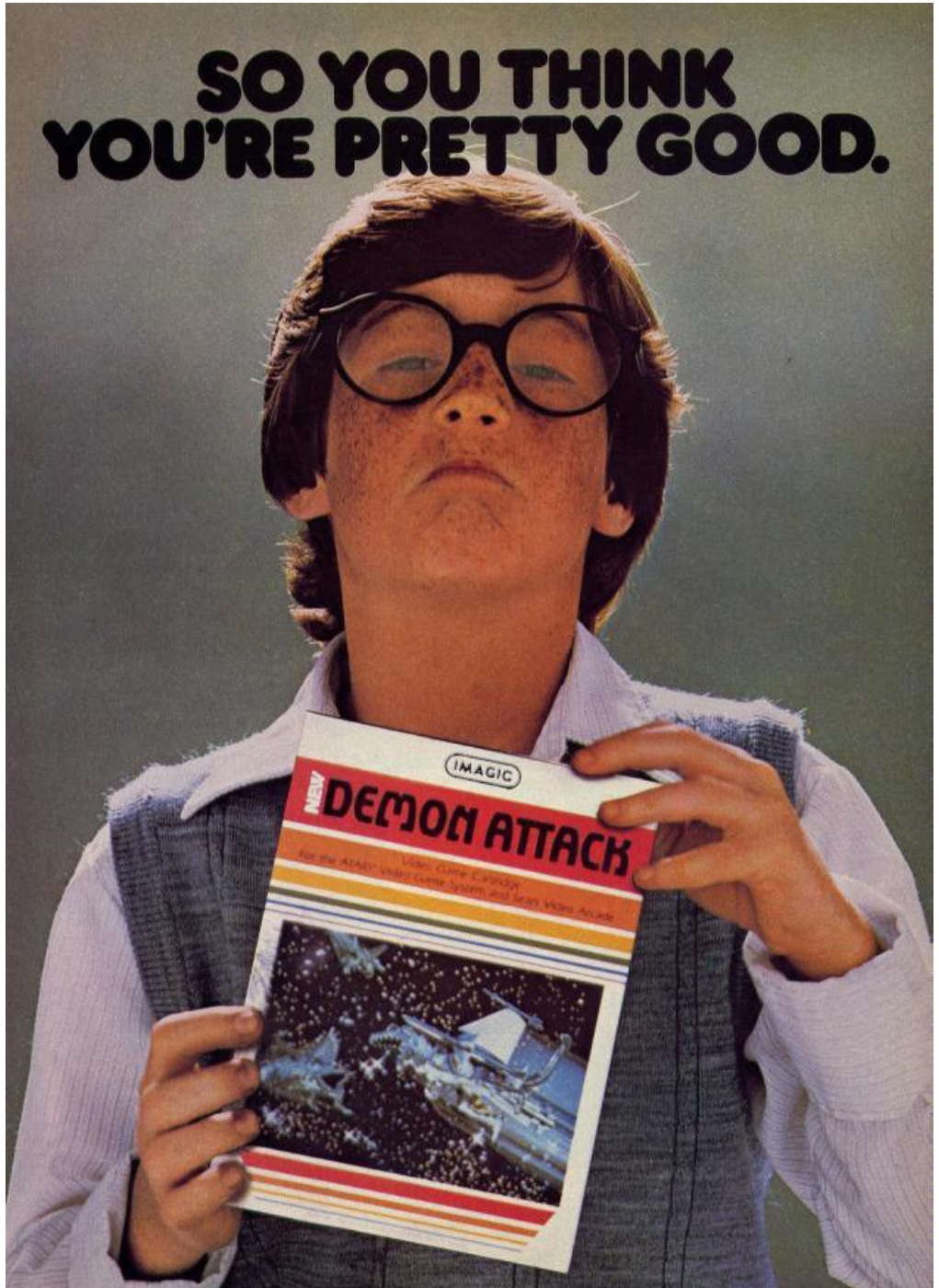*Encounter!* (Atari 8-bit, Synapse Software, 1983)
A real gem of a game that I didn't discover until years later. If you want a good *Battlezone* game, I mean...a REALLY good *Battlezone* game (as good or better than the coin-op), forget Atari's lame home port attempts and give this one a try. Warning - this game gets utterly brutal in the higher levels.

Journey to the Planets - (Atari 8-bit, JV Software, 1982)
Another overlooked classic. The graphics are early VCS-quality but some of the puzzles are very challenging and the gameplay and control is more than adequate. Unless you either happen to be the game's designer or you resorted to cheating, you won't beat all the puzzles the first time you try. Perfect example of, "Great graphics do not a great game make".

Matterhorn (Atari 8-bit, Tigervision, 1984)
Cool multi-screen game with elements of *Moon Patrol, Jungle King*, and *B.C. II: Grog's Revenge*, and unfortunately none of the limelight or kudos that those garnered. So shine some light on this one for a change.

ROMPAGE

"DP Relaunch"

Where is John Hardie?!?!?!

That's the question that many of my friends, foes, and other miscreants have asked over the past year. Why would anyone care you might ask. The truth is most people couldn't give a rat's ass about my whereabouts! So why am I going to tell you a story about what happened to me? Mainly because I think there's a lesson to be learned from my absence. So curb your yawns for a moment and listen to my tale…

Over the years collecting video games has always been a great source of enjoyment for me. When my friend Keita first got me to sign up to the Internet, a huge doorway opened up to me. Now instead of mailing out trade and price lists with several other collectors like Sean Kelly and Frank Polosky, I was able to reach a huge audience of people who shared a common interest. All one had to do was scan a few of the regular video game newsgroups and a wealth of information could be found. I welcomed the opportunity to talk to people who felt the same passion I did. Sure there were some jerks, but they were usually beaten down and drowned out so the good guys could continue on with their newsgroup auctions and other activities.

Around this time, I was introduced to IRC. I tried to like it but honestly I just couldn't get into it. Here were a group of people who wanted to talk about world events, politics, and other crap when all I wanted to know is if anyone ever finished all 150 levels of *Lode Runner*. I wanted to talk video games all the time and it seemed they were more interested in making fun of people and deciding who they were going to ban from the channel next. It left a pretty sour taste in my mouth as I couldn't understand why you would have a video game channel if you didn't want to talk video games. If I cared about political views, I would read a newspaper; not consult some geek who hardly ever left his house, or realized that girls existed. In all, I found most of them to be pretty arrogant and a bunch of jack-asses.

So life went on, but the Internet changed! Much like the transition from bulletin boards to the Internet, newsgroups gave way to message boards, or forums, and eBay took away

the fun of newsgroup auctions. While the newsgroups clung to life, new dedicated Web sites like Digital Press and Atari Age sprung to life and gave an anonymous voice to every troll on the net. I was literally amazed at the amount of time some users spent on these Web sites. They were always there! Morning, afternoon, night! Didn't they work? Sleep? Pee? With the advent of these and other dedicated video game sites came the concept of community. I was initially lured in to these communities as well, expecting to find some fellow video game fans, and I did. In my opinion some of the smartest and friendliest collectors in the world reside on these sites but to me the true value of these sites is the information they hold, not the silliness and pettiness that seems to have flourished in these environments.

I realize by now most of you have started to doze off a few times and I am probably starting to ramble but I don't give a fuck, so wake up! Over time, our hobby has started to fracture with many factions taking a stand for one cause or another. If you're active online, you've seen DP vs. AA, me vs. Curt, AA vs. Randy Chrifield, etc. and a lot of smaller battles, ad nauseum. It always amazed me the way that various individuals would jump to arms for a battle they had no knowledge about. One of the things that drove me crazy was when I heard that someone that I didn't know didn't like me. How could they not like me when they've never met me? When they've never talked to or emailed me? Did they know anything about me other than the fact that someone else had a problem with me in which they only got half the story? Of course not, and the same holds true for any of these "battles", "wars", or whatever you may call them. The main point is that all the drama that has developed over the years is destroying this hobby. Years of constant crying, whining, hating, fighting, and whatnot has led to a hobby that just isn't fun anymore.

So where does it end? It ends by doing what I've done for the past year. Nothing!!! At the beginning of the year, I was burned out from all the drama and nonsense. There was nothing fun about reading on AA that I was a rom-hoarder and scourge of the earth. I would only get aggravated by newbies with their heads up their asses that made ridiculous statements

about video games. And I still hated forums where people didn't discuss video games. Why would I want to waste hours reading this drivel?!? I realized I didn't and basically turned off the computer for a good 9 months. For 9 months I didn't check or respond to email. I didn't follow up on sales and trades with close friends (sorry Marco). I was suspended from eBay for not following through on a couple of auctions I won. I barely spoke to my close friends like Joe and Sean. As someone who never missed the monthly NAVA collector's meeting, I only attended 2 all year. Joe even hosted a "Where is John Hardie" NAVA where a picture of me got you 10% off at the register and bringing me to the register got you 15% off. That's how bad it was! I didn't want to know about DP, CGE, AA, or anything else about video games. I'm ashamed to admit it, I even thought of selling off my collection. These were dark times for sure.

We're almost at the end so bear with me. Towards the end of the year I began to take a long, hard look at the situation. Joe had just told me that he had hooked up an Atari 8-bit computer to his big screen TV to do some research for the new guide. That comment sparked something inside of me. I suddenly realized what had been missing for the past several years. I HADN'T PLAYED! I was too busy with all the drama, nonsense, and bullshit that I hadn't done what I loved more than anything! Play the fucking games!!! I had become the thing that I hated; someone who talked about nonsense and didn't spend any time actually playing the games. This awakening inspired me to clean up my basement (well, only half of it), but enough that I could hook up the ol' Atari 800XL to my 36" TV. Add a 1050 drive and suddenly I was in heaven. All the classics were clear, big and bright. Games like *Miner 2049'er*, *Spelunker*, *Montezuma's Revenge*, *Mr. Robot*, *Quasimodo*, *Alley Cat*, *Realm of Impossibility*, *Capt. Beeble*, and others roared to life and brought me back to a simpler and happier time.

So here we are in January of the New Year and my spark has been reignited. I answer email again (jhardie@pipeline.com still works). I talk to my close friends. I attend NAVA! I completed some pending trades with old friends. And I'm genuinely excited about the hobby again. Don't expect to see me on the forums or

various boards, but I have discovered Facebook. The lesson I want to pass on to you is this: forget the BS and get back to playing!!! If you're a Commodore VIC-20 fan, when was the last time you played a game on it? If you love the Colecovision, when was the last time you powered it up and sat there for an hour playing *Donkey Kong*? And don't give me that emulator excuse! Playing on an emulator will never match the real thing. Now I'm not telling you to give up your online activities, but how about spending an hour or two setting up and enjoying your old games instead of listening to some jack-ass wax poetic on a forum about something you couldn't give a shit about. Don't be an asshole like me and burn out! Play now before it's too late!!!

In the words of the immortal Joe Santulli who coined this phrase (even though every jack-ass and their brother uses it now like it was their idea): GAME ON!

DEMON ATTACK

IMAGIC

Created by experts for experts
981 University Ave., Los Gatos, CA 95030

DIGITAL PRESS
the video game database

To subscribe, send $10 check or money order in U.S. funds to:
Joe Santulli
44 Hunter Place
Pompton Lakes, NJ 07442

contact = dpzine@yahoo.com