

*digital press*



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# From the editor's desk...

Hello again, and welcome to issue 67. Surprised to see us this time? From what I understand, not many of you were expecting to find an issue of DP in your mailbox back in February. Strange, given most of you had paid for subscriptions. Actually, it may have seemed like a long time between issues 65 and 66 to YOU, but all of us had switched over to Battlestar Galactica time centons ago.

After wrapping up issue 66, we were eagerly anticipating feedback on the 'zine's "reboot". How did people like the new layout? What did they think of the new writers? Were the reviews missed? Did the issue seem unfocused without a theme to bring it together? Did readers find the more adult tone appropriate, or did you think it was haughty and "un-DP"?

We didnt't get any of those answers. There were three general reactions:

"Oh wow, I was SURPRISED to see this!"

"This is awesome."

"You sent it to my old address."

Sadly, most comments were some variation on "surprise" and "wrong address" rather than "awesome". We weren't really sure what to do next, and we floundered a bit (and uhh, sort of forgot to do a Spring issue...sorry). It became a bit alarming when Joe Santulli called me and said, "Hi. Say, are we still doing that 'zine?" We've found ourselves trapped in a vicious circle... the more we work on the 'zine, the more we want to play games, the more we play games, the less time we have for the 'zine.

But fear not, faithful reader, there's been no relapse, we have not faltered, there will not be another hiatus. After a prolonged period of scratching our heads in shocked amazement that the reboot actually WORKED, we've finally come to our senses. Some very interesting developments are in the pipeline for issues 68, 69, and 70. As for this one...well, if you liked issue 66, you'll like this. And hopefully it showed up at the correct address this time.

Enjoy,

Jeff

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## ON THE COVER

"Pulse"

by Eric St-Cyr

We at Digital Press are just pausing for a moment to wonder at our own existence. Eighteen years after two strange and hairy guys cobbled together our first issue on a primitive typewriter, the DP 'zine is still alive. Not alive AND well...but alive. Gaming journalism itself seems to have come down to a faint, flickering flame. But there's life.

Your thoughts are welcome at [dpzine@yahoo.com](mailto:dpzine@yahoo.com).



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### Founders

Joe Santulli  
Kevin Oleniacz

### Editors

Jeff Belmonte  
TIm Snider

### DP Staff

Ian Baronofsky  
Jeff Belmonte  
Jared Bottorff  
Chris Chandler  
Paul Z. Cortez  
Dave Giarrusso  
John Hardie  
Kevin Moon  
Rob O'Hara  
Joe Santulli  
Tim Snider  
Scott Stilphen  
Rob Strangman  
Sarah Szefer

### Cover Art

Eric St-Cyr

### Production

Joe Santulli

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# ON THE PROWL

“THE GENERATIONAL SLIDE CONTINUES”



I used to be amazed by the legs the original Game Boy and Game Boy Color had. Probably the single event that changed the game for buyers of GB and GBC was the sale of and discontinuation of those games at GameStop. If you live outside of the U.S., perhaps you don't know that GameStop is a new and used game store that is like the Starbucks of gaming. There is one on every corner. Policy changes at GameStop massively change the availability of a system. Once they stop taking trade-in games for a system, flea market, garage sale, and thrift store shoppers see the games in droves. For years, I would only see GB and GBC games sold for \$7 or more, which seems grossly overpriced. In their Game Boy/Game Boy Color blowout, all of their games were 75% off. I ran around to about 15 stores over the course of a month and grabbed up all the titles I didn't already have, and paid no more than \$5 for any single cartridge, mostly around \$1.75. I ended up with a lot of duplicates and even picked up some titles for resale. There were tons of gems, but I definitely wasn't the most ambitious or aggressive buyer in my area. With the recent deluge of cheap games on the market from GameStop, there are many more of these games out there to be resold outside of GameStop. I originally thought that GB/GBC games were so popular that the market for them drove prices. The artificiality of the market has dawned upon me. It is apparent that GameStop was single-handedly responsible for the relatively high prices we saw for more than a decade for this system on the retail front. Backwards compatibility was probably a factor in the potential popularity of the original Game Boys. In retrospect, the relatively steep prices are related to GameStop price-rigging than actual value in the old-school Game Boy games.

Now the most common games I'm seeing in the wild are PlayStation, PS2, and Xbox games. Prices aren't uniformly low, although buying resale is a completionist-collector game of averages. I'll buy five \$1 games and average out the single \$8 game that I found. Part of the excitement of being a shopping addict and collecting video games is never knowing who or where games will come from. Every seller is different. Career sellers, like the regular vendors at flea markets, will try to get every overpriced cent out of you. Irregular or one-time sellers are generally where the bargains are. Unfortunately these one-time game sellers are by nature the hardest to find reliably, and they often have the worst selection of games. You may have a mom dumping her teen's game system, or a junk hauler selling at a flea market who just wants to empty out their truck. Their ideas of value could be overinflated, reasonable, or very low. The best opportunities for inexpensive buys are at yard sales (i.e. garage sales) and rummage sales (i.e. church sales). Folks selling through these venues are most interested in converting volume into cash, as opposed to maximizing every cent of profit. For the first time recently, I went to a yard sale and found a family with about 50 PS2 games, all complete and in excellent condition. They were perfectly happy to let them go for \$2 each. I bought about a dozen of the most interesting titles and moved on. If you consider the PS2 a current gen system, this is unprecedented. Of course, the PS2 is a last gen system with long legs. In the past, plummeting prices for a system's library usually is a skip-generation phenomenon. For example, when Nintendo 64 came out, NES prices were hurtling toward the ground. When Dreamcast came out, Genesis games became a fine deal. Xbox games are also prematurely inexpensive. To compound the plummet, GameStop recently stopped taking Xbox games for trade-in.

In the last year, I decided to go for a complete Xbox collection. I played a lot of the system, and I appreciate the first really successful American-designed system since Atari. Call it patriotic nostalgia. I was gobbling up Xbox games at GameStop during their quarterly buy 2 get 1 free sales. I probably managed to get about half the Xbox collection at a price point of \$4 each, complete. I wasn't horribly picky about condition, and all of

the games were used. I was savoring in the selection. I didn't buy much sports (the curse of the completionist collector ever since the Sega Genesis). I attempted to home in on future rarities. My speculation was probably misguided. I enjoyed the shopping (as an addict is bound to), although I probably could have held out until GameStop discontinued trade-ins for the Xbox. And I certainly wish that I'd made sure to pick up only near-mint condition games. Given that I don't have endless spare time to hit every shop in the region whenever a sale occurs, I'm not deeply regretful. However, now that I'm seeing that I can get reasonably-priced sealed copies of Xbox games, I hope this represents my own lesson learned.

When last gen games are dropping in value this quickly, there is definitely change afoot. I can't help but ruminate about the implications. GameStop unwittingly creates a price-fixing scenario with their nationwide price uniformity and inventory control. GameStop doesn't operate in a vacuum. The Internet also influences their price scheme and customer's expectations. Although we had the Internet for the last few generations, now the Internet is the driving force representing the mass market dispersion of pricing. Prices are instantaneously conveyed to all corners of the fiber-accessible world. Video games are a volatile commodity. The market has an appetite for the latest releases, leaving last year's releases rapidly diminishing in value and demand. Relatively few games escape this vortex of near-valuelessness. Rarity is less of a driving force than ever. Most of the market for old games is now centered around players rather than collectors. Mass market interest in classic games centers around nostalgia and escape. I've made a small business out of selling common classic games in order to recoup collecting expenses. There isn't a ton of profit in it, but it's enough cash to defray a few expenses in my senseless collecting quest. I'm proud to bring people back to a warm fuzzy place they are craving. I don't feel that business for these games has slowed down during this time of economic turmoil and recession. Folks want to get back to simpler times more than ever. Isn't that what gaming nostalgia is all about?



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TOHO CO., LTD.

2069 Century Park East, Suite 490,  
Los Angeles, CA 90067  
TEL: (213) 277-1081  
FAX: (213) 277-6551  
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# DIGITAL PRESS FEATURE

“ANALOG KIDS VS. DIGITAL MEN: RETRO GAMING AND THE DIGITAL TELEVISION TRANSITION”

Ever wondered how people made phone calls in your grandparents' day and age? You simply picked up the telephone and told a human phone operator listening on the other end whom you wished to call. You did need to give the party's "exchange number" (a combination of letters and numbers), but you didn't enter it yourself. Then approximately 55 years ago, the phone company (there was only one back then) began phasing in a system where you had to enter the number by yourself. The system involved new-style telephones with "dials" and a set of tones that came from the earpiece indicating whether a line was available, ringing, or busy. This is the system with which we are all more or less familiar today, yet back during its initial implementation it was the source of much confusion and frustration. The burden of dialing one's own phone number seemed too cumbersome to some people; many people wondered aloud why there even had to be such a change in the first place.

One sees these same types of adverse reactions today when considering the United States' current prolonged transition from the broadcasting of analog television signals to predominantly digital transmissions. Do I have the right kind of television? Will my old television work after the transition is complete? Do I need one of those converter boxes or not? The Digital TV (DTV) transition, like the do-it-yourself telephone, is the source of much hand-wringing and uncertainty. Those of us who still enjoy playing video games made for consoles of yesterday, and likewise younger gamers enthused exploring or collecting for the "olde school", may find themselves uncertain how to utilize these older consoles in the next 5 to 10 years. Both groups have many additional questions to ponder as we come to terms with how to sustain our hobby in light of these rapidly approaching changes to the standards of television and video display technology.

## To Mod Or Not To Mod

Let's say that you've decided to enter the DTV era in grand style and have purchased a large-sized high definition television with a layout more akin to a movie screen than the conventional television's square shape. Fascinated by the gaming possibilities on this gigantic-sized display screen, you pull your trusty old Intellivision out of storage, excited at the prospect

of playing *Astrosmash* with a ship as large as your head. On the back of this television are probably every type of possible video connector you can imagine - and possibly a couple you have never even seen - yet you can't quite figure out where the VHF/UHF screw posts are located whereupon to attach your TV/Game sliding selector switch. Your Intellivision, and pretty much any console you own made between 1972 and 1984, are relics from a time when it was assumed that the television to which the machine would be attached had only one type of signal input (commonly called "RF"). How then are we to accommodate this crude technology for use on a 21st century device?



The most direct route would be to acquire an adapter that takes the male RCA-style jack on the end of your console's RF cable and converts it into a male cable coaxial end. These devices can be found at Radio Shack and cost around \$4 apiece. Once you have one of these, you can toss that old slider selector switch into the trash and attach your console directly to your television's cable port. If you're a cable subscriber then you might wish to purchase a coaxial switchbox as well, to avoid plugging

and unplugging the coaxial input whenever you want to switch from TV to game or vice-versa.

Many classic console owners take the route of modifying their consoles' RF output signal to something slightly less antiquated such as the composite-type outputs that are more or less universal to external video devices in the present. To do this requires some small measure of knowledge about electronics in general, the procedure specific to the game system in question (as the process is different from console to console), and a willingness to do some soldering. Depending on the exact game system, the procedure could be as simple as splicing two wires out of one, or all the way up to the complexity of building a small circuit out of discrete components. Alternately, there are a few online resources who either sell pre-made signal output modifiers or will modify your system for you, albeit usually at a higher price than doing it oneself.

Is modding your classic console the way to go? On the pro side of the argument there is the fact that your console will potentially have an output connection type that has several more years of sustainability with new television sets. Additionally, many people believe that going from an RF to composite output type vastly improves the overall picture quality of the system as there is no more significant interference from outside signals (as was often the case with RF output). On the con side, as explained above, such modifications imply certain proficiencies with electronics work that you may not actually have to the degree necessary to do the job correctly. Secondly, modifications may require the physical alteration of the console along the lines of drilling holes in the casing for cables or switches. If you own classic consoles with an eye for selling them down the road, such modifications may affect the collector value of the machine by altering its original design and condition. In either case, modification of a console's audio/video output system should not be undertaken without consideration of its long-term impact.



### Plasma vs. Phosphor: Dueling Display Types

Once you've got your classic console hooked up to that gorgeous 60" screen, you may notice while your games look great, they may not exactly look "correct". For that matter, they may not be playing correctly either; moves or skills you've spent years mastering on one particular game may fail by a millisecond. Something may simply feel "off". Don't worry, it's not you. At least it's probably not you. Many people notice or feel latency in the response time of particular games attached to an LCD or plasma screen, whereas these slowdowns weren't manifested when the game was displayed on a standard television tube. The problem is related to the fact that a plasma or LCD screen displays and processes significantly more information than a tube-style television,

and that the inputs of a game controller are secondary to the refreshing of the screen. If this issue affects your game play significantly, you might want to consider not taking your old tube television out for recycling and keep it handy for playing those classic consoles. For that matter, if you still play any video games involving light guns such as Nintendo's *Duck Hunt*, you will definitely want to keep your CRT handy as older light gun games cannot be played properly on plasma or LCD screens.

### But Where Will We Get New Old TVs?

For those wishing to keep a tube-based television handy for retro gaming, a single visit to any big box electronics retailer will quickly demonstrate that brand new tube-based televisions are no longer being manufac-

tured or sold. Now that the DTV transition date in June 2009 has passed, tube-based televisions will become increasingly difficult to obtain, at least in good working order. One can also assume that there will be very little interest on the part of the average consumer (particularly one using a new DTV converter box ) in repairing an old tube-style television or replacing a broken one with one of the same, and the device will eventually be scrapped in exchange for a newer plasma or LCD-based set.

From where, then, shall tube-based TV's be obtained? For the foreseeable future, thrift stores are a viable option. Prices for the sets on hand may begin to drop significantly as more buyers seek out digital televisions. However, thrift store selections may be negatively affected when the DTV transition takes full effect. The thrift stores may be deluged with obsolete sets which they can neither sell for a profit nor dispose of in an environmentally-conscious way, and place a moratorium on taking in any more such sets. With that scenario in mind, it might be worth your time to start keeping a mental list of family, neighbors, etc. who currently have analog television sets that you anticipate

may be made available when these people decide to upgrade. Put the word out that when this time comes you'll be happy to do them the favor of hauling away the old set and putting it to good use.

Whether one wishes to attach his classic consoles to a newer television or continue to use a classic tube-based set, a little bit of planning will ensure continued retro gaming for a long time. I, for one, will be using an old 27" Sony tube set for as long as it lasts. I'm amused by the idea that my Atari 5200 may be the only thing within 10 square miles "broadcasting" on channel 3.

# THE BREWERY

“WHAT’S HAPPENING ON THE HOMEBREW SCENE”

Like all of the pre-crash video game systems being produced in the Golden Age of video gaming, the Mattel Intellivision had its fair share of arcade ports.

*Bump n’ Jump?* Check. *Frogger?* Check. *Donkey Kong?* Barely.

But one of the games that seemed to slip through Mattel’s hands was the Irem/Williams effort *Moon Patrol*, and it wasn’t for a lack of want. Atari had already locked down the license to port the game over to their systems, and they did so, developing the game for their 2600 and 5200 systems and their XE computer line. Not content with that, Atarisoft also ported versions of the popular game to other computers, such as the Commodore 64, the VIC-20, and the TI-99/4A (a ColecoVision version never saw a final release). What do all these systems have in common? They’re not the Intellivision.

Fast forward 25 years later. Intellivision homebrew programmer Joe Zbiciak, developer of *4-Tris*, noticed this glaring omission in the Intellivision’s library and developed *Space Patrol* to fill this need with his group, Left Turn Only.

For those who don’t remember (or weren’t around in the first place to know) what *Moon Patrol* was like, the object is simple. You control a space buggy going from point A to point Z, trying to keep yourself alive along the



treacherous planet landscape. Along the way, you’ll need to jump over craters, destroy giant rocks that block your path, and take on alien invaders who will try to attack you from above (or behind) in order to destroy your buggy.

*Space Patrol*, cleverly named as to avoid trademark infringement and to associate itself with the numerous “Space” games Mattel developed for the Intellivision, is more or less an exact port of the *Moon Patrol* arcade game, but with a few beefy additions. Four different locales are available to play through, each with its own various pitfalls and enemies, and two different difficulty settings per level.

Controls are simple. Use the disc to move your

space buggy back and forth. The top action buttons fires, and the lower buttons allow you to jump. Thankfully, the arcade game’s control scheme was pretty simple, so that’s all you need to play and not worry about messing with the keypad at all. The sound is incredible and a very accurate note-by-note reproduction of the original *Moon Patrol* music and sound effects. Even better, if you still have an Intellivision Entertainment Computer System module kicking around, *Space Patrol* will take advantage of its advanced hardware and extra sound channels and output

even better sound. But if you don’t, don’t be disheartened; the sound isn’t too shabby without one either.

Sound isn’t the only thing that remains intact. The graphics remain faithful to the original arcade game, and they look very impressive. Still images can’t convey the achievement of parallax scrolling Zbiciak and Co. implemented into the game. It’s very smooth and doesn’t feel choppy or forced at all. It won’t be a hindrance to those playing the game. Enemies may not resemble the same shape as the arcade version, but they are reminiscent of another hit Intellivision game, *Astrosdash*. It’s just another touch that gives the game a uniquely Intellivision feel and not just another carbon copy port of a popular arcade game.

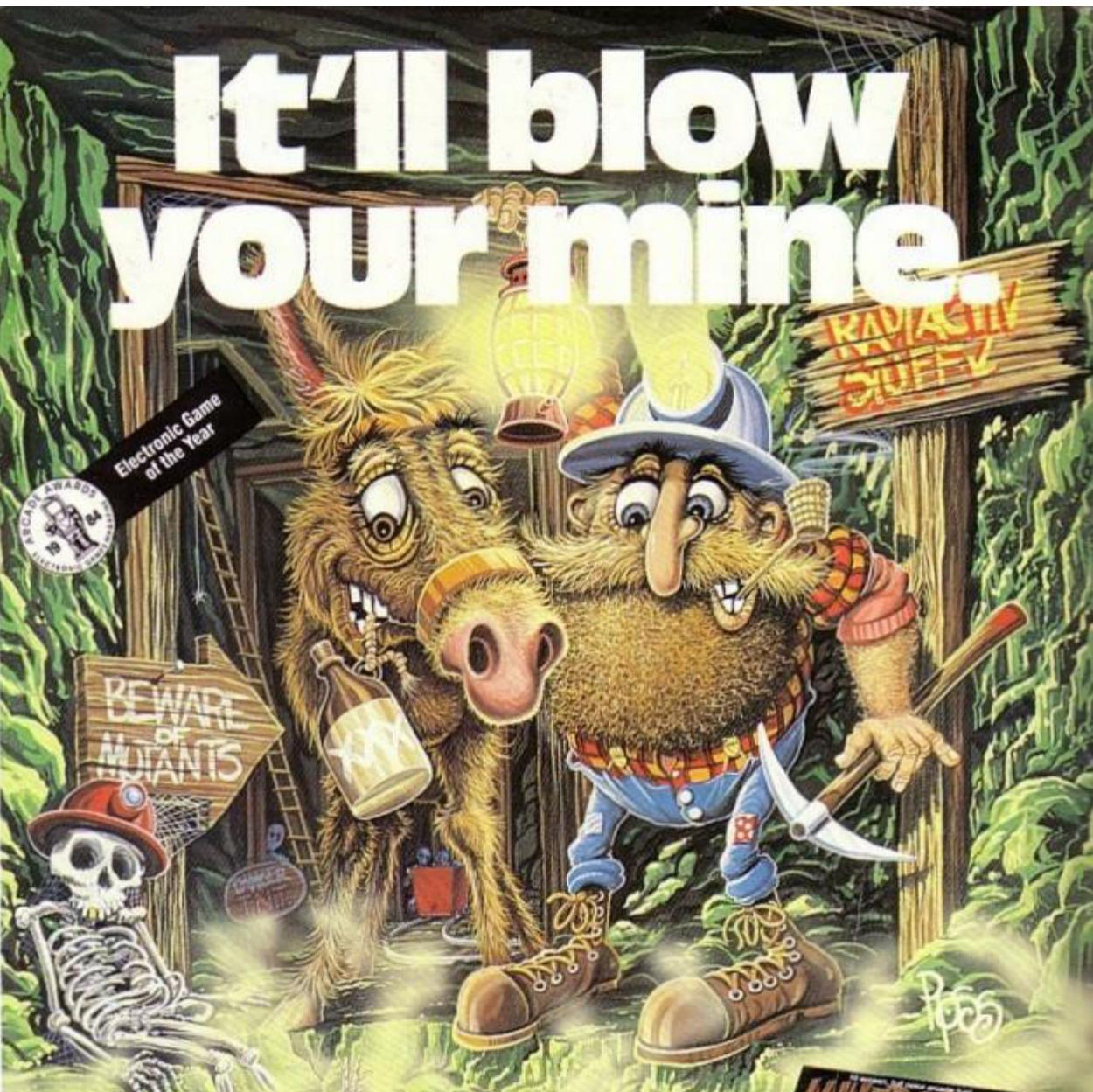
But enough minutiae and details; the game-play is very faithful to the original *Moon Patrol* game, and the object of the game still involves blowing up rocks, jumping over craters, and blasting alien invaders out of the sky.

Sadly, those are who are chomping at the bit to own their very own *Space Patrol* cartridge might have to keep their fingers crossed. All 220 copies of the first run have been sold out with future runs uncertain. There is a “teaser” ROM available on the Web site to download and run on emulators, but it does have its limitations. If you’re determined to own one, your best bet is to search eBay or hope a collector decides to get rid of his copy sometime soon. It’s well worth the search.



# It'll blow your mine.

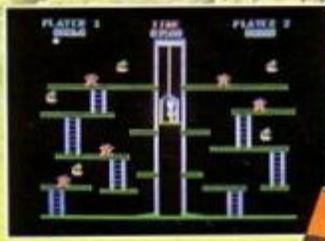
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# DIGITAL PRESS FEATURE

“DP INTERVIEWS GAME DESIGNER TOM SLOPER”

DP: What inspired you to go into game design?

Tom Sloper: I had no idea I was going to become a game designer when I took a job with Western Technologies as a model maker.

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

Tom Sloper: I don't know how a programmer could inspire me. I mean, I've liked many of them I've worked with, and admired the skill of them. As for games that inspired me, I was very impressed with *Dreamfall: The Longest Journey*, which I played all the way through last year. Not many of them inspire me to stay with them all the way through.

DP: Did you work for anyone prior to Western Technologies (after school)?

Tom Sloper: Yes. Several odd jobs and several years as an engineering model maker in Cincinnati.

DP: How did you hear about WT?

Tom Sloper: They had a want ad in the newspaper (they were a “toy think tank” looking for a draftsman). I figured, if they design toys, and they need draftsmen, they might need model makers. It turned out I figured right. I worked there from 1979-83.

DP: According to Paul Allen Newell, Jeff Corsiglia and yourself were the main game designers at WT. I know (from your incredibly detailed website [www.sloperama.com](http://www.sloperama.com)) that your game design career started with working on the GCE **Game Time** and **Arcade Time** watches, and the **Space-N-Counter** calculators. How much did that experience help in working with the Vectrex and VCS?

Tom Sloper: Immensely. By the time I was assigned to work on those consoles, I already had the design lingo down - and I had a computer with word processing software. No more writing out game designs by hand and having Jay's secretary type them.

DP: What was the game development process like?

Tom Sloper: Well, Jay Smith would tell me what he wanted designed, and then I'd write a design. A programmer would then be assigned to work on it. The programmer would read the design and let me know if there were parts of the design that weren't do-able or needed

further explanation. Apparently, that process wasn't in wide use in the industry at that time. A lot of interviewers keep asking me what it was like to program for the Vectrex. I never did.

DP: Why did you leave WT?

Tom Sloper: Jay offered me a new sort of deal. Rather than continuing as an employee, I'd be a sort of partner and would be paid according to the profitability of my products. And for a product that wasn't profitable, that could cost me money. At the same time, I was offered a job at Datascan, where some ex-WT people had gone. I would have the opportunity to learn a little about programming, and continue to design games. That opportunity seemed more attractive than the new deal Jay had proposed. That job lasted 9 months, and then I got the job offer at Sega.

DP: Did you work with anyone else when designing games back then (pre-Nintendo NES)?

Tom Sloper: I worked with numerous artists and at least one musician. But those game systems were so limited graphically that it was often easy enough for the designer or the programmer to just go ahead and create the art himself. We had one musician (I don't remember his name) who was good at understanding the limitations of the audio processors and making tunes that worked. I had one friend who helped create some art I could use in a design document, but I don't know if he wants his name used.

DP: How did the VCS version of Sega's **Up 'N Down** come about?

Tom Sloper: When I was assigned to do the port of this game, I predicted that it would be impossible to do it on the 2600. I went ahead and wrote a design document, which was sent to Beck Tech in Berkeley. When I went up to visit the Beck Tech office, I was astounded to see that a programmer had actually succeeded in making a passable 2600 version of *Up 'N Down*. I have forgotten his name, but I remember that he was a Vietnamese refugee who had come to America on a rickety boat. His engineering skills were used to repair some problem on the boat, which resulted in the survival and arrival on these shores of the refugees shortly after the fall of South Vietnam to the communists.

I should add that in writing the designs for both *Up 'N Down* and *Tapper* (all my work at Sega was ports of arcade games), all I did was study the arcade games and write documents that described (in each case) the arcade game as it would be played on a home system like the 2600 (or the ColecoVision, or the IBM PC Junior, or the Apple II...). And in doing so, I made sure that the controls would be similar for all games I designed on a particular system (based on the most widely-used controls on that system). It was a system of standards that was adopted by others at Sega and that I took with me when I went to Atari and Activision.

DP: Were you involved with any other Sega titles?

Tom Sloper: I was assigned to write a design for a *Congo Bongo II* arcade game, but Jeff Rochlis, the company CEO, didn't like it. He wanted the game to take place on amusement park rides, and I wanted it to take place in a lost jungle where prehistoric creatures still lived. My friend Patrick King worked on the *Spy Hunter* ports, and Sam Palahnuk worked on *Star Trek*.

DP: There were also a number of movie-based titles that Sega announced (in a CES press kit) for the VCS that were never released - box art for most of these can be seen at - [http://www.digitpress.com/faq/vcsalt/cc\\_vcsalt.htm#48hrs](http://www.digitpress.com/faq/vcsalt/cc_vcsalt.htm#48hrs) Do you know anything regarding these titles?

Tom Sloper: Interesting. I never heard of any of those. I was only at Sega from January to December 1984, you understand. When the video game industry crashed, I started working on toys and board games.

DP: Several of Atari's VCS games that were started prior to 1986 eventually saw release under Atari Corp., such as Bob Polaro's **Road Runner**. As Director of Product Development at Atari Corp., were you involved with assessing any of these older titles for possible release?

Tom Sloper: I produced a large number of games while I was with Atari Corp. I don't remember *Road Runner*, but I do remember hiring Bob to work on a couple of 2600 games when I was at Atari Corp. If I remember correctly, the only two we were able to resurrect were *Ballblazer* and *Desert Falcon* (both for the 7800). The source code was all on computer tape. I made friends with the IT guy, and he enjoyed helping me find unfinished game code on the tapes of those old machines. I called a lot of the old

programmers, got phone numbers of other programmers, and talked to them about the status of those old unfinished games. Most of them couldn't be finished without a lot of time. And of course, time is money.

*DP: Atari had acquired the rights to release VCS games from several companies, including Coleco. Do you recall anything regarding Coleco's VCS Turbo? Atari had a CX# assigned to it but it was never released.*

Tom Sloper: That title may have been before my time at Atari Corp. If that was the same Turbo that was a Sega arcade classic, I became very good friends with its creator, Noriyuki Hanawa, when I worked at Sega.

*DP: Do you recall who programmed the following Atari Corp. VCS releases:*

32-in-1 (released)  
3-D Asteroids  
Crossbow (released)  
Ikari Warriors (released)  
Jinx  
Lode Runner  
Mat Mania Challenge  
Off The Wall (released)  
RealSports Boxing (released)  
Super Soccer  
Surround II  
Thunderfox  
White Water Madness  
Xenophobe (released)

Tom Sloper: *Crossbow* and *RealSports Boxing* were developed by Imagineering (later renamed Absolute Entertainment). Other than *Lode Runner*, I never heard of any of the other games on that list.

*DP: After Atari, you worked at Activision for 12 years. How was it working for the original third-party video game developer?*

Tom Sloper: That was a great job. How was it? Well, we went through several address changes and a major management change, I got to work in Japan, and I got to design and produce numerous *Shanghai* games. It was an awesome experience.

*DP: There's some debate as to whether or not Activision owns the rights to Imagic's software library or merely acquired the rights to re-release them (they started doing this while known as Mediagenic). According to former Imagic CEO Bill Grubb, they didn't own them then or now. Do you know anything about this?*

Tom Sloper: All I know is that Bruce Davis said they had the rights, so I produced the re-releases of some Imagic titles.

*DP: Do you remember what early or tentative titles your other games had (if any)? We know of at least two – US Games Entombed (aka Pharaoh's Tomb) and Picnic (aka Catch The Fly).*

Tom Sloper: Almost every game I ever worked on went through a title change between concept and release. It's standard operating procedure in the game industry.

*DP: Were there any games or projects that you worked on that ultimately never got released or even finished?*

Tom Sloper: Of course. Most of the games that got cancelled never got much beyond the paper concept phase, so I doubt that your readers would find them all that interesting.

*DP: Occasionally, programmers would put little "Easter eggs" in some of their games that would reveal their name or a message. Are there Easter eggs in any of your titles? Do you recall any fellow co-workers that did this?*

Tom Sloper: I don't think my Vectrex games had Easter eggs. The only Easter eggs I definitely remember are *Leather Goddesses of Phobos 2* (The Gas Pump Girls Meet The Pulsating Inconvenience from Planet X), in 1992, when Activision went through that awful bankruptcy, and moved to Los Angeles, and *Shanghai: Great Moments* (the Windows 95 version). *LGOP2* had an obscure Easter egg... if you pressed a particular series of keys you'd get to see the player character wearing a fig leaf. And *Shanghai: Great Moments* had my associate producer's baby's picture in one of the folders on the CD. But since both of those are computer games that require obsolete operating systems, and since I'd need a Macintosh to read the file that gives the details of those and any other possible Easter eggs, that's about all I can tell you.

*DP: If you had a chance to redo any of your games, what would you change (if anything)?*

Tom Sloper: I don't want to redo any of them.

*DP: Did you ever attend any industry shows, such as CES or Toy Fair?*

Tom Sloper: Of course.

*DP: What were some of your best/worst experiences at all the companies you've worked at?*

Tom Sloper: The worst game company I worked for was Atari Corp. The most enjoyable job I had was at Western Technologies, but I also treasure my many years at Activision.

*DP: Do you still own any of your games for these systems, either as a keepsake, or to show friends or family?*

Tom Sloper: Of course. Every one.

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

Tom Sloper: That's a toughie. I guess the *Shanghai* games that I designed are all favorites. I tend to like card games, table games (including mah-jongg and Sudoku), and

adventure games best.

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

Tom Sloper: Whoa! Can you narrow that question down for me? I think it's obvious how it's evolved. What kind of thoughts are you looking for?

*DP: In general. For example, although the graphics and sound of a driving game like Project Gotham are 1,000s of times more powerful than they were 20 years ago with say, Pole Position, the gameplay of both is fundamentally still the same. So in effect, in most cases, all we're offered is a prettier picture. Many seem to feel it's the inevitable result of the rising costs of development – as with movies, companies are less likely to invest in an unproven concept, but rather stick with "tried-and-true" successes. Do you feel games today are better or worse than they were 10, 20, or even 30 years ago?*

Tom Sloper: Simply put...better.

#### SOFTWAREOLOGY

**Game & Watch**  
*Missile Strike*  
*Alien Assault*  
*Blastaway*  
*Firing Squad*  
*Calculators*  
*Chase-N-Counter*  
*Space-N-Counter*

**CP/M**  
*Spatial Madness*

**VCS**  
*Entombed (co-design)*  
*Picnic (co-design, graphics)*  
*Q\*bert (graphics, PAL conversion)*  
*Tapper (design)*  
*Up 'N Down (design)*

**Vectrex**  
*Bedlam (design)*  
*Spike (design)*  
*T1-99/4a*  
*E.T. And His Adventures On Land (graphics)*

**3DO**  
*Shanghai Triple Threat*

**Saturn**  
*Shanghai Triple Threat*

**PS1**  
*Shanghai Triple Threat*

**Dreamcast**  
*Shanghai Dynasty*

**Mac**  
*Shanghai Dynasty*  
*Shanghai Great Moments*  
*Shanghai Mah-Jongg Essentials*  
*Shanghai Second Dynasty*

**PC**  
*Pretty Good MahJongg (graphics)*  
*Shanghai Dynasty*  
*Shanghai Great Moments*  
*Shanghai Mah-Jongg Essentials*  
*Shanghai Second Dynasty*

For more details on Tom's video gaming career, visit his website, at <http://www.sloperama.com/business/prodlist.htm>

# QUARTERS AND TOKENS

“CLASSIC DUAL JOYSTICK GAMES”

**R**obotron: 2084. BattleZone. Crazy Climber. These three games are always in the mix when gamers discuss dual-joystick arcade games, and each of them, conveniently perhaps, is the poster child for a subcategory of the dual-stick mechanic: the “move/fire” group, the “tank” group, and the “other” group respectively.

Arguably the greatest game of all time, *Robotron:2084* (1982) defines dual-stick, move/fire gaming. It led to an official sequel (1983’s flight stick-controlled *Blaster*), inspired a few “spiritual” dual-stick sequels (1990’s *Smash TV* and 1991’s *Total Carnage*), and games that could be deemed as “knockoffs” but are more accurately described as having similar controls. But was it the first?

Gaming history reminds us that the move/fire control scheme for *Robotron* was developed by Eugene Jarvis following a car accident that left one of his hands in a cast. Jarvis was a fan of the game *Berzerk* (1980) and was frustrated by the inability to fire while moving. Pairing up two sticks so that he could fire and move simultaneously (but independently of one another), and while wearing the cast, the control scheme for *Robotron* was born.

Rex Battenberg’s *Space Dungeon* (1981) has the same control scheme and was released a year or so earlier. The move/fire idea – brilliant in its simplicity – was inevitable, especially given that dual-joystick control games date back to at least 1974. It’s very possible that both developers invented the move/fire panel without any knowledge of the other guy doing the same thing. Great minds do think alike.

*Black Widow* (1982), Atari’s quickie replacement for their masterpiece *Gravitar* (1982), follows the *Robotron* lineage. Here, robots have been replaced with bugs, screens are a variety of webs, and the action, while still frenetic, is dialed down a bit. To call *Black Widow* a “vector *Robotron*” is easy, but not entirely accurate.

Stern’s *Rescue* (1982) also mimics a few aspects of *Robotron* while maintaining its own distinct personality. Using the move/fire control, the player’s primary goal is to rescue humans. Unlike *Robotron*, they’re being rescued from the dangers of the sea as they fall

out of the sky. *Rescue*’s screen also scrolls to the left and right, and the multitasking aspect evokes a very different feel that likely inspired Dan Gorlin’s *Choplifter*.

Gottlieb entered the move/fire fray with *Krull* (1983), based on the movie of the same name. *Krull*, like fellow movie licensee *Tron*, is a great game that features multiple scenes. *Krull*’s scenes differ in that they build toward a showdown before repeating with ramped-up difficulty.

Konami’s *Tutankham* (1982) may surprise some gamers as a move/fire entry. Different from the familiar Parker Brothers ports, the arcade version of *Tutankham* boasts two joysticks, one to move, and an x-axis stick to fire.

King of the “tank” control games, Atari’s *BattleZone* (1980) delivers an authentic tank control scheme. Prior to *BattleZone*, Atari (Kee) released *Tank*, *Tank II*, *Tank III*, *Tank 8*, and *Ultra Tank* between 1974 and 1978. This series of games was the basis for the Atari 2600’s *Combat*. *BattleZone* remains Atari’s most fully realized outing, widely known for its first-person perspective, attention to cabinet design, and brilliant vector graphics. Atari would revisit their tank game roots with *Vindicators* (1988) and as manufacturer of Namco’s *Assault* (1988).

The “other” category contains all the wacky games that don’t utilize move/fire or tank control schemes. In *Crazy Climber* (1980), each stick corresponds to the Climber’s hands. Moving the left stick forward causes the Climber’s left hand to move forward and so on. *Crazy Climber* got a new paint job in 1981 and resurfaced as *Rock Climber*, essentially the same game with the backdrop changed to a mountain instead of a building. 1988’s *Crazy Climber 2* took advantage of the more sophisticated graphics of the late ‘80s while keeping the original gameplay and setting intact. Eight years later, Data East combined the *Crazy Climber* concept with the isometric view of *Zaxxon* for *Fire Trap* (1996).

In *Tapper* (1983), one stick controls the on-screen hero while the other stick, disguised as a beer tap, serves drinks to thirsty patrons. A year later, Bally Midway served up *Timber* - one stick still controls player movement, the

other is used to swing a mighty axe.

One of the strangest dual-stick games of 1983, SNK’s *Munch Mobile*, uses one stick to control the player’s car and the other stick to control the car’s hands. The *Munch Mobile* designers effectively created a fun exercise that’s sure to keep even the most seasoned veterans’ eyes off the road. The other strangest dual-stick game of 1983 is Toru Iwatani’s other game, *Libble Rabble*. Here, the goal is to clear screens of enemies by corralling them within shapes drawn by two arrows, with each stick controlling an arrow. Whimsical, fun, and ahead of its time, *Libble Rabble* was a game in search of an audience that wound up confusing most casual players.

Data East introduced the one-on-one fighting game with 1984’s *Karate Champ*. While later fighting games like *Mortal Kombat* and *Street Fighter II* used up to six buttons and only one stick, *Karate Champ* effectively used two sticks to execute a wide array of fighting moves.

So after taking a look at many of the classic dual-stick games, what have we learned, Charlie Brown? Despite *Robotron:2084* being the most well known of the dual-stick games, Dr. J. isn’t the first guy to come up with putting two sticks on a control panel. Beyond that, we can break the dual-stick control scheme down into three categories. Finally, there might be at least one game here that you haven’t heard of. And if not, then maybe there’s at least one game here that you had heard of, but didn’t know used dual-sticks. And if not, then congrats, you’ve earned your PhD in Dual-stick Games from DP University!

#### Timeline

1974 - *Tank*  
 1974 - *Tank II*  
 1975 - *Tank III*  
 1975 - *Tanks*  
 1976 - *Tank 8*  
 1978 - *Ultra Tank*  
 1980 - *Battlezone*  
 1980 - *Crazy Climber*  
 1981 - *Rock Climber*  
 1981 - *Space Dungeon*  
 1982 - *Black Widow*  
 1982 - *Robotron:2084*  
 1982 - *Tutankham*  
 1983 - *Krull*  
 1983 - *Libble Rabble*  
 1983 - *Munch Mobile*  
 1983 - *Tapper*  
 1984 - *Karate Champ*  
 1984 - *Timber*

# BARGAIN BIN BLISS

“MORE GAME FOR LESS MONEY”

This month's Bargain Bin Bliss features two games that I purchased used for less than \$5 each, but I have spent up to 20 hours playing. That works out to 50 cents per hour of gaming goodness! Whether you want something cerebral and stealthy or something fast and flashy, these games will give you more than your money's worth.

As before, there are the four criteria all selected BBB games must meet:

- The game must be available for less than \$8 at any typical used video game store.
- The game must be somewhat under the radar, having received little to no advertising or publicity when it was newly released.
- The game should bring something new to the genre it represents.
- I gotta like it.

**Spy Fiction** (PlayStation 2, Sammy Studios, 2003)

A terrorist organization named ENIGMA has developed a biological weapon, intending to use it against the “unbelievers” unless stopped. You look out of the plane's hatch and leap out unseen by the ground forces while anti-aircraft fire explodes around you. You and your team have only hours to put an end to this madness before the world is plunged into darkness.

Cue the theme to *Mission: Impossible*.

In *Spy Fiction*, you are a member of Team PHANTOM, trained to execute missions of global security. But unlike other “race in guns a-bla-zin” missions, the tasks of PHANTOM require secrecy, stealth, and infiltration.

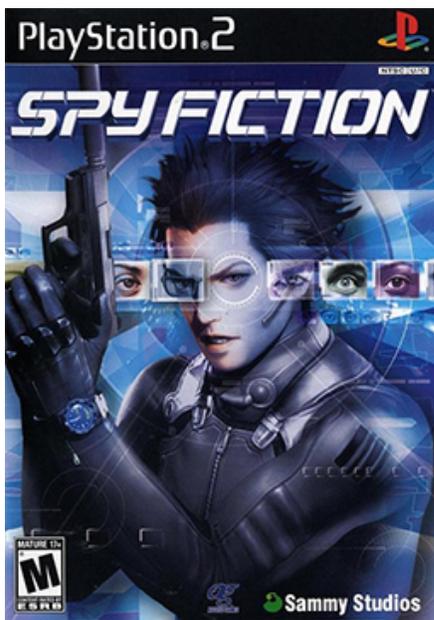
To achieve this, each agent is equipped with a specially designed Spy Suit that will help you with your mission. If you remain motionless, the suit's optical camouflage will allow you to blend in with the surroundings. If you are able to snap a photo

with your 3DA Cam, your suit will change to match the clothes or uniform of your photographed target. Other spy tools round out your utility belt such as Spider Grips that let you stick to sheer surfaces and Repelling Gear for quick ascents and descents.

Oh, and you have the usual assortment of lethal guns and grenades.

As you skulk toward each objective, keep an eye out on the Alert level in the corner. Guards and other enemy targets are constantly looking for infiltrators. Unidentified noises, mysterious tracks in the snow, gunfire in the distance, and other evidence of your presence will swing the Alert Level from Safety to Caution to Danger. When the level's at Danger, you may as well bring out your gun and start shooting because the entire facility is on lockdown until you are discovered. However, if you hide out (or even better, disguise yourself), the alert level will drop again.

The game play is much simpler than similar games such as *Metal Gear Solid*. You don't have to deal with the bodies of guards since they simply “fade away” once dispatched. If discovered, you can hide while the guards see you, but they apparently forget you quickly enough. So the “realism” takes a bit of a hit. But what really appealed to me were the storyline, graphics, sound, and atmosphere that really ratchets up the tension level while you play, making for a nail-biting experience.



For a bargain bin game, you can't ask for much else other than solid game play and an exciting story. *Spy Fiction* delivers both as you attempt to get in unseen and get out alive.

**Freaky Flyers** (PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube, Midway, 2003)

Take the basic “funny vehicles racing” concept of the *Wacky Races* cartoon show. Add in the warped animated humor of Tex Avery. Now imagine if such a thing were programmed by a very deranged game designer. You'd have a very small idea of what's contained within the wild flying racer *Freaky Flyers*.

*Freaky Flyers* takes the basic cart racing concept and turns it on its head by introducing more to the action than just “how fast can you make a lap?” It also asks you to achieve other goals while in flight for power-ups and other rewards such as unlocking hidden characters. For example, while racing through a forested track, you may need to drop off a hitchhiking Bigfoot, shoot down some trees to help out the loggers nearby, or blow up a few beaver dams. In a city track, can you also put out a few building fires and thwart a bank robbery. There is much more to do than simply coming in first place. But if coming in first is important, you can take one of the many shortcuts and side routes. You can also use your guns to blow the competition out of the sky (and watch your back since they'll be taking potshots at you too).

Since this is a “flying” racer, you have a degree of depth to your steering since you must climb and dive over the terrain. Will you fly over a hill in your way or will you take a chance that the cave opening leads to a shortcut? Deciding the best and fastest route through the course is a big part of the game.

What I find most enjoyable about this game are the surreal cartoon-like settings and wacky designs of the characters. From the devil-may-care attitude of ace pilot Johnny Turbine to the overinflated “charms” of Traci Torpedoes, the characters of this game each have their own bizarre personalities and sub-goals to achieve. If Warner Brothers, Hanna Barbera, and Ruby Spears Studios ever got together and threw all of their most outrageous, over-the-top characters into a blender, you'd get the cast of this game. The constant taunts and jibes while in the race plus the many, MANY animated cut scenes between races make you feel as if you're part of a grand cartoon competition.

If you want a great racing game with lots to explore and discover, with a dozen tracks and more than 30 different racers to complete against and fly as yourself, *Freaky Flyers* will give you hours of high-flyin' racin'. Plus, it's not only fun, it's damned funny.

# RETROCOMPUTING

"COLLECTING CLASSIC COMPUTER GAMES"

Coming from someone who collects computer games, I must admit I get a little jealous whenever I see a really great looking collection of console games. Every time I see someone's neatly assembled collection consisting of row after row of identically shaped boxes, I always sigh a little and think the same thing to myself: "You console collectors have it so easy."

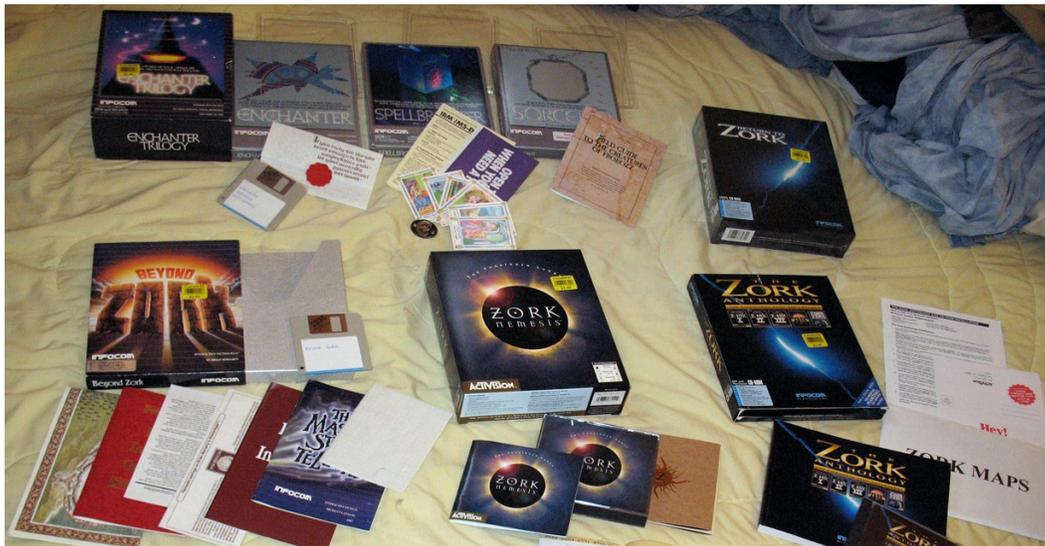
"What?" I hear you cry. "Do you know how long I searched to find a boxed copy of *Kool-Aid Man*? How can collecting stupid old computer games be harder than that?" Trust me, collecting old computer games can be just as, if not more, challenging than collecting console games.

I already mentioned one of the hurdles of collecting and displaying computer games, and that is that there is no standard box size. No matter how I arrange my collection, my shelves always look like a tornado just came ripping through. Even my relatively small collection of computer games consists of big boxes, small boxes, fat ones, and skinny ones. My boxed *Mindscape* compilations are so wide they stick out almost a foot off the front of my shelves, and next to them are several (relatively) newer games that were only released in jewel cases. I have a collection of old Electronic Arts games - the ones from the '80s that came in "album-like" packages - that are so skinny you can barely read the names printed on their spines; if you turn them sideways, suddenly they take up too *much* room.

Displaying these old games is just one of the problems retroputing collectors face. If you intend to play these old games as well, here's another concern; there's a pretty good chance that any disks inside those oddly shaped boxes are long dead. 5.25" floppy disks weren't all that reliable even back when they were

new. The back side of most floppy sleeves contained a list of things that could cause data loss, which included (but was not limited to) touching them inappropriately, writing directly on them with a sharp pen, bending them, placing them near a magnet (this includes CRT monitors and televisions), getting them

One of the biggest frustrations computer game collectors face is that there is no standard price guide. Most collectors agree that classic games from Infocom, Electronic Arts, and Sierra are more valuable than, say, productivity packages, but who's to say what their values actually are?



The other biggest frustration...there is no end. For consoles, even for the most popular of systems, there are a finite number of games to collect for each one. With each new purchase one more title can be checked off of a collector's list, counting backwards until there are none left. Retrocomputer gamers have no such luck; there are literally tens of thousands of

too hot, and getting them too cold. Even if the games you find have been ideally stored in some magical temperature-controlled environment safely away from sharp ink pens and magnets, sometimes age alone is enough to kill a floppy.

If you're collecting for one of the more popular retrocomputer brands (Commodore, Apple, Atari, and others), finding a working disk drive shouldn't be a problem. If you start collecting retro PC games, that adds a whole new level of complexity as you'll need a way to transfer those old 5.25" diskettes onto your modern PC. Here's a trivia fact for you: no one has ever mass-produced a USB-compatible 5.25" floppy drive for the PC. Trust me, I've looked. Transferring games off those old floppies to a modern PC is a pain that requires old game collectors to either (A) maintain an old computer, or (B) stick an old floppy drive into a modern machine (if it'll even support it). Few computers come with even a 3.5" drive these days (my laptop came with one; it's external, and USB), and I suspect before long support for these old storage devices will disappear altogether from new computers, both physically and at the BIOS level.

games out there for old computer gamers to collect. GameBase 64 (a Web site dedicated to archiving old Commodore software) has documented over 20,000 unique games for the C64 alone, and who knows how many thousands of titles have been released for the PC over the past 30 years. Faced with a damn near impossible task of completing any single game collection, most retrocomputing collectors have resorted to making (and completing) their own mini-collections, typically by collecting a complete game series ("every *Ultima* game") or possibly even every game for a system by a specific manufacturer. Without any specific boundaries in place, computer game collectors find themselves continually buying everything they run across but getting nowhere.

While it's not for everyone, collecting old computer games can be a fun and challenging hobby, just as entertaining, engaging, and enjoyable as collecting console games. Just don't expect them to look nice and neat on your shelves.

# DOUBLE JEOPARDY

“WHERE BAD GAMES GET A SECOND CHANCE”

## **Auto Modellista (GameCube, Capcom, 2003)**

**The charge:** *undermined Capcom’s bid for a serious racer with its awful controls*

Remember this one? Capcom’s eagerly anticipated cel-shaded racer was supposed to compete with the latest entries in the *Gran Turismo* and *Ridge Racer* series, but was quickly buried in poor reviews and negative word of mouth. The problem? The cars were unsteerable.

The jury was out for a long time on this case. Yes, the controls are floaty. Does that break the game? I’m not so sure. *Auto Modellista* is one of those games that requires a significant player investment. You’re not going to jump right in there and start winning races a la *Ridge Racer*. Frankly, most players (who presumably aren’t conducting fanzine research) are going to give up within ten minutes.

But think back to your first experience with *Gran Turismo*. Remember fish-tailing in all those license tests? Would you have even bothered to continue if 100 people hadn’t already told you it was the supreme masterpiece of racing sims? I’m not saying *Auto Modellista* is as rewarding as *Gran Turismo*, but the learning curve required to get your vehicle under control is similar...without the “benefit” of all those license tests.

So if you do manage to overcome the control issues, you’ve got a neat little racer on your hands. The cel-shaded visuals still hold up today (just make sure you turn that annoying wind effect off first), there are plenty of manufacturers and vehicles, the tracks are varied and well-designed, and progression through the game is logical. Although there are too many superfluous extras like vintage oil cans and posters for your garage, there’s also some real meat to the game...I especially like the way you can easily tune your vehicle based on the course you are racing and the disposition of your speediness.

**Verdict: not guilty.** *If you are willing to put a few hours of practice steering cars into a 6 year-old racer, there’s some fun to be had.*

## **Shaq Fu (Genesis, Electronic Arts, 1994)**

**The charge:** *this poster child for licensed, celebrity-endorsed garbage is among the worst fighters ever made*

Imitation is the sincerest form of bad gaming. I can’t think of a milestone title that didn’t spawn a pile of copycat shovelware. *Street Fighter II* probably inspired more lousy games than any other in history. *Shaq-Fu* is one of them.

Here’s the story. While visiting Tokyo, basketball superstar Shaquille O’Neal stops in a martial arts dojo for reasons unknown. There an old man tells Shaq to walk into a portal, and Shaq obeys. Without expressing an iota of surprise or fear at being transported to another dimension, Shaq wanders around in the game’s overworld. The remainder of the story is more senseless, because it is not told in linear fashion...you get a different piece of the story based on wherever you decide to walk next. So when you walk to the jungle section Shaq will say “Tell me where to find Sett Ra!”, but you don’t know what he’s talking about because that part of the story is told in another section.

It sounds funny, but there are so many little things wrong with *Shaq-Fu* they eventually add up to an irritating experience. The animation is fluid but the characters move at such a ridiculously speedy pace it appears choppy. Shaq’s special move is the “Shaq-uriken”...basically it’s Ryu’s hadoken, but with a lengthy dance animation tacked on at the beginning that gets Shaq tagged every time. Why is the the picture of Shaq in his life bar so badly drawn? Why are the hilarious pre-fight taunts from the story mode absent from the versus mode?

*Shaq-Fu* is brought down because of these details. It’s not one of those games that is so aggressively bad you begin giggling as soon as the title appears. It’s bad, but its weaknesses are revealed gradually rather than coming right out and hitting you on the nose.

**Verdict: guilty.** *Check out the 3DO and Jaguar if you want to play worse fighting games, but those aren’t as irritating as Shaq-Fu.*

## **Doom (3DO, Art Data Interactive, 1995)**

**The charge:** *the worst console version of Doom*

According to the Digital Press Online Rarity Guide, there are six straight-up versions of *Doom* for consoles: PlayStation (my favorite, but not entirely “straight-up”), Sega 32X (good), Jaguar (good, but no music?), Saturn (not played by me), SNES (no), and 3DO. The 3DO version is rumored to be not only the worst of the six, but one of the worst games on the system.

It doesn’t help that the 3DO got what is widely considered the very best version of *Doom*’s immediate predecessor, *Wolfenstein 3D*. The expectation that *Doom* would be at least decent was not unjustified.

The most frequent criticism of the 3DO version is that it is “windowboxed” so that gameplay only takes place in a small portion of the screen (a la *Accolade’s Zero Tolerance*). How bad is it? I’m playing it on a wide, stretched, upconverted HD display, and I don’t find it to be a problem at all. On a 25-inch TV from 1995, it might be a problem. There is a pretty bad frame rate issue when you have more than three or four bad guys on the screen though. If you’re nostalgic for the 3-D slideshows on that underpowered Packard Bell PC you bought in 1994, you’ll feel right at home here.

Aside from that frame rate issue, it’s *Doom* as usual, with one notable exception. The music rocks. This was back in the day when CD-based music on a console was still a novelty, and the 3DO delivered many a fine soundtrack; this is one of them. It’s not quite as good as the thunderous *Wolfenstein* soundtrack, but I found myself trying to speedrun through the game just to hear how each level’s music was recreated.

**Verdict: mistrial.** *The court orders an appearance of the Saturn version immediately. Direct comparison to the SNES version may also be necessary. The court recognizes that the poor reputation of 3DO Doom may not be entirely warranted, and that it’s still better than Cyberdillo regardless.*

# MATTERS OF IMPORT

“IMPORT SHOOTERS FOR THE GENESIS/MEGA DRIVE”

In late 1989, the Sega Genesis launched in the United States. Sega, determined not to make the same mistakes it had made with the Master System, started to sign many third-party licensees. Within a year's time, such companies as Namco, Dreamworks, Renovation, and Seismic were bringing over some of the best games Japan had to offer. Such titles as *Gaijres* (Telenet), *Target Earth* (NCS), *MUSHA* (Compile), and *Phelios* (Namco) helped round out the Genesis library in that crucial first year. Sega's print ads promised even more games to come. While most did make it out, a few mysteriously vanished. Not surprisingly, most of these were shooters. The Genesis was home to many shooters, and the staggering amount released in the first couple of years may have led to the games listed here to be passed over.

One of the earliest games slated to come out for the Genesis, a shooter by Micronet called *Curse*, vanished; not only did it never surface, but the licensee that was to release it vanished too. The INTV Corporation was set to release *Curse* sometime in '90. EGM even reviewed the game, giving it fairly respectable scores, but it never arrived on store shelves. INTV never did release any games at all, for reasons unknown to the general public. *Curse* did get released in Japan, and in retrospect, it's probably for the best that it was never released here, due to the choppy animation, skewed difficulty curve, and overall shortness.

The successor to the very odd 1986 Data East arcade game *Darwin 4078*, *S.R.D.: Super Real Darwin* received a Mega Drive port in '90. Entitled *Darwin 4081*, it continued the saga of a bizarre squid ship that uses DNA to evolve into more powerful forms while simultaneously blasting everything in sight. It was previewed in *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, but never did surface in the U.S. Perhaps Sega only had the rights to release one Data East title in the U.S., and out of what was available, they chose the *Contra* clone *Midnight Resistance*. It's just as well; shooters were a dime a dozen on the Genesis at this point, whereas there were virtually no run-n-guns. *Darwin 4081*, while a good game, offered nothing that *Phelios* and *MUSHA* didn't already have, aside from the whole DNA evolution thing.

“All your base are belong to us.” Sound familiar? It should, if you're familiar with the once-popular, but still occasionally referenced, Internet fad. The phrase originated in the

European Mega Drive release of Toaplan's *Zero Wing*. Had *Zero Wing* been released in the U.S., chances are we would have gotten it complete with the hilarious Engrish opening that those lucky Europeans got. But much like several other side-scrolling shooters at the time, *Zero Wing* was passed over in favor of other, possibly more deserving ones like *Thunderforce III* and *Gaijres*. The game itself is a solid, if somewhat uninspired, shooter. It's not as good as Toaplan's earlier efforts, but still worth a look.

On the other hand, NCS' *Gley Lancer* is a phenomenal shooter that was criminally overlooked by the powers that be. From the cinematics to the presentation and the controls, *Gley Lancer* competed with the mighty *Thunderforce* games and *Gaijres* for the title of best side-scrolling shooter on the Mega Drive. It may have been passed over because of the amount of text needing translation, or it may have been viewed as just another shooter when the American market was already overcrowded. *Gley Lancer* was recently given another shot at life by being made available for the first time in the U.S. on Nintendo's Virtual Console service for the Wii.

Another criminally overlooked title was Palsoft's *Undead Line* (developed by T&E Soft), an overhead shooter similar to Technosoft's *Elemental Master*, but with a much darker theme. In fact, it felt like a shooter based on *Castlevania* or *Splatterhouse*. It was an updated version of an MSX game (it was also ported/ upgraded for the Sharp X68000 at the same time), and featured a warrior named Leon. His job: to defeat the demons led by Count Brahzen. It's a brutally hard title, but worth playing if you enjoy a challenge.



CURSE



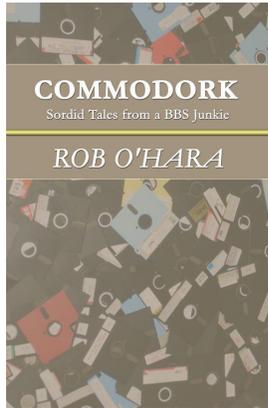
DARWIN 4081



UNDEAD LINE

# EIGHT BIT UT

“A REVIEW OF ROB OHARA’S *COMMODORE*”



Once upon a time, the online world was a no-man’s land that was the realm of students, government workers, and computer geeks. The latter, using a personal computer and a landline modem, would connect one-on-one to share their experiences and, especially, files. Local bulletin board system (BBS) communities would form, often surviving until the early days of the Internet as we know it, in the mid-1990s. Since long-distance fees were charged

whenever a BBS user would communicate long-distance, those communities tended to be composed mostly of local members, which also spurred real-life friendships through regular meets.

One such BBS operator (or sysop for short), was DPer Rob “Flack” O’Hara. Through most of the 1980s and a good part of the 1990s, he was an active member of the Oklahoma scene, living for the distribution of pirated games. (In his book’s introduction, Rob is quick to point out that his past activities do not mean that he now condones piracy. As he wrote, what was once dismissed as a petty activity is now fraught with lawsuits).

Rob brings the readers back to that long-gone era; by recounting his own online and offline adventures, he creates a true time machine. With his lively writing style and his great wit, he shows us that he was, indeed, a true BBS junkie. His book is much more than the simple tales of a teenage hacker who aimed at being the king of the warez; it is also a time capsule back to the 1980s, back when mom-and-pop computer stores were still common (his own parents owned such a store) and when

computer and console gaming belonged in two separate worlds.

The great thing about this type of memoir is how the thoroughly personal becomes universal. Fellow sysops from other areas can relate to Rob’s experiences; even people who had never used a BBS, either because of age or circumstances (I am one of the latter people), will get a good idea of what it was like to be part of the BBS scene. And for anyone who would be shocked at the illegal contents of the book, remember that this was in another era, totally different from today, back when the word “hacker” did not have the same negative connotation as it does now.

*Commodore* is the kind of page-turner that you won’t put down until you’ve finished reading it. The only problem is that at the end you want even more anecdotes! Since the book is self-published, the best way is to get it via Amazon, Rob’s site (<http://robohara.com/commodore>), or at the Digital Press brick-and-mortar store in Clifton, NJ.

CHRIS CHANDLER

# EVENT HORIZONS

“AN INSIDER’S REPORT FROM THE LATEST CLASSIC GAMING EVENTS”

I recently took a trip to Wisconsin to vend at the Midwest Gaming Classic convention in Oconomowoc, WI. Going in I had low expectations, especially after comparing cons to the old days of Philly Classic, as well as CGE back in San Francisco and Vegas. I was reassured by many in the online classic gaming community that it would be well worth the trip. After working some details out with Dave2236 of the DP forums, I decided to help load and unload as well as run a booth in exchange for some table space.

I shipped three boxes of random retro gaming goodness out to Wisconsin, packed up some clothes, and hopped a plane to Green Bay. We loaded a 26-foot Penske truck full of arcade machines, cartridges, boxes, manuals, discs, memorabilia, and more. After arriving at Oconomowoc, I immediately sensed something different. Vendors were actually vendors! What I mean is vendors who had tables actually sold items. Recently, I have noticed the disturbing trend at cons where a vendor will pimp out one or two products, or even just try to promote their business,

while selling few or no items at all. However, at Midwest Gaming Classic there was none of that. Every vendor had parts, games, and/or memorabilia at their table. Very impressive. Arriving at the show, the staff was very helpful in helping us unload and directing us to where we were supposed to go.

As the show floor opened on Saturday, I could immediately tell that this show was going to be different. It was a buyer and seller’s show. Deals were to be found everywhere. Vendors were giving discounts, free games, and more. People had money. I don’t care what the economy is like, there are still a lot of people who have a lot of disposable income to burn on copies of *Shaq-Fu* (yes, someone bought a copy of *Shaq-Fu* from us) and *Mario Party 3*.

No money? No problem. There were over 25 arcade machines set to free play, as well as over 30 or so pinball machines. There were also roughly 20 console stations that were set up to play anything, from classics to Xbox 360. There were a bunch of tournaments including Guitar Hero, Rock Band, and

pinball.

All in all I would say that MGC 2009 may have been the best game show of the year, and that CGE is the only show that could potentially give it a run for its money. Attendance was very high, and I heard nothing but positive comments from both vendors and attendees. I would definitely go back again, as a vendor with a more dedicated setup. The organizers sold the floor space of the show out quickly, and there are rumors of a larger venue being acquired. I am all for it, especially if they move it closer to a major city like Milwaukee or Green Bay! Overall, Midwest Gaming Classic 2009 was THE show to be at so far this year.

# STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

## “WHAT TO PLAY”

### Jeff Belmonte recommends:

*Dark Sector* (PlayStation 3, D3 Publisher, 2008)  
If you're reading DP you probably remember the glaive from the movie *Krull*. *Dark Sector* is an over-the-shoulder shooter in which you use a glaive as your primary weapon. I realize the glaive is probably enough for most of you, but I should mention there are also stealth kills, aftertouch moves, rocket launchers, decapitations, monsters, context-sensitive events, and bloody, screaming deaths. And it's cheap. And it has good graphics. And there's also that glaive.

*House of the Dead 2 and 3 Return* (Wii, Sega, 2008)

I just took every light-gun game in my collection and put them in my trade box. Get yerself that fancy Nyko Perfect Shot and some Wii component cables; you're in for a treat.

*BattleSport* (PlayStation, Acclaim, 1996)



A far better *Ballblazer* game than the official sequel (the overly busy *Ballblazer Champions*). This is also excellent on the 3DO, but the PlayStation version is probably more accessible to the general populace.

### Dave Giarrusso recommends:

*Ghost Squad* (Wii, Sega, 2006)

*Ghost Squad* is a dead-on port of the Sega coin op, and that's a GOOD thing. The game blends traditional "blow away the bad guys while saving the innocent" action with sniping, hand-to-hand combat, and disarming bombs. Throw in branching paths, hidden extras, two-player simultaneous play, and over-the-top storylines, and *Ghost Squad* single-handedly makes the Wii a must-own console. Yeah, it's a tad short.

It's an arcade light-gun game, it's supposed to be short.

*No One Can Stop Mr. Domino* (PlayStation, ArtDink, 1994)

No one can stop him, but a lot of gamers ignored him. Their loss. *No One Can Stop Mr. Domino* is among the finest games ever released for any console. Guide your character around a track, carefully placing dominoes to set off tricks. Then...you guessed it, knock 'em all down in one fell swoop. Sound easy? It's not. This game is clever, beautiful, challenging, and subtly hilarious all at once. Play this game until you think you've seen everything it has to offer, and then play it some more. Because there are definitely tons of things you missed.

*Super Punch-Out!!* (Arcade, Nintendo, 1984)  
Forget *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!* Next to the arcade originals, the NES version is crap. True *Punch-Out!!* fans know that no video-boxing experience tops Nintendo's pair of arcade games. *Super Punch-Out!!* is as much fun today as it was in 1984. What's different in *Super* from the better-known original? Not much - if it isn't broken, nothing to fix. *Super Punch-Out!!* boasts five new fighters, the ability to duck, and new stats including percentage of punches landed. If you're not knocking out your opponents in less than 45 seconds, you're not playing the game; the game is playing you.

### Rob Strangman recommends:

*Gradius III* (Super NES, Konami, 1991)

Konami's first Super NES game was also the first home port of a *Gradius* game that truly looked and felt like the arcade. The music, graphics, and control were top-notch. If you found yourself dying a lot, nine times out of ten it was from pilot error, not faulty controls or terrible scenery. It suffered from slowdown, to be sure, but in a lot of cases the slowdown actually helped you out. It also gave us a taste of what Konami had in store for us on the Super NES.

*Strider* (Arcade, Capcom, 1989)

A collaboration between Capcom and Motomiya Kikaku led to this, Capcom's finest hour. Guide Strider Hiryu (a high-tech ninja carrying a plasma blade called Falchion) through five of the craziest levels ever created to reach the

Third Moon and destroy Grandmaster Meio. From the frantic run down the mountain in Siberia as bombs explode behind you to fighting dinosaurs in the Amazon and beyond, *Strider* is a combination of brilliant level design, perfect controls, and fantastic visuals. If you've never played it before, what are you waiting for? Find it bundled in with the sequel, *Strider 2* (PS1), as part of *Capcom Classics Collection Vol. 2* (PS2/Xbox) or pick up the fantastic Genesis port. You can't go wrong with any of those.

*Splatterhouse* (Arcade, Namco, 1988)

The superior version, especially when compared to the bare-bones TurboGrafx-16 port. Guide Rick Taylor, parapsychology student-turned-zombie smasher, through the horrific West Mansion in search of his girlfriend Jennifer. Yeah, it's just an updated version of *Kung-Fu Master* with weapons and branching paths, but for any horror buff it's a must-play, thanks to the incredible atmosphere, gory visuals, and tips of the hat to '80s horror flicks both well known and incredibly obscure. It also has a plot twist that was unheard of at the time; how many games let you think you'd rescued the girl, only to have to fight and ultimately kill her? Not many.

### Paul Z. Cortez recommends:

*Retro Game Challenge* (Nintendo DS, Bandai Namco, 2009)

A video game about classic video games...it was bound to happen sooner or later. You're sent back in time to 1984 by a virtual-reality otaku and must find your way "back to the future" by demonstrating your classic video game skills in a set of fully playable Famicom/NES style titles. It's great fun for those of us old enough to remember this era clearly. Give a copy to your kids to help them develop old-school chops.

*War Of The Monsters* (Playstation 2, Sony Computer Entertainment, 2003)

Original giant monster fighting game with fully destroyable city-sized environments, unique attack capabilities and phenomenal two-player gameplay. I'd put this title up against any Godzilla game made in the last 10 years (and I love Godzilla). The drive-in movie styling to the menus and load screens is a nice touch.

Desperately deserves a sequel with online multi-player capabilities.

*Return of the Invaders* (Arcade, Taito, 1985)  
One of the first of many updated versions of the renowned *Space Invaders*. The game incorporates power-ups, differing enemy formations, and is rendered with full-color graphics and backgrounds. It all makes for a surprisingly addictive and fun interpretation of this arcade legend (and good luck getting that background music out of your head).

#### Kevin Moon recommends:

*Hack 'Em* (Atari 2600, 2004)  
Atari Age member Nukey Shay overhauled and revamped Ebivision's *Pesco* (which was itself a reworked and altered *Pac-Man*) and blessed the video game community with this perfect gem, a masterpiece that shows us what *Pac-Man* could and should have looked like on the Atari 2600. Absolutely arcade-perfect in every detail, *Hack 'Em* even contains all of the intermissions and *Pac-Man Plus* as a variation, which is also arcade-perfect! This game will knock your socks off; download a copy and start playing!

*Spatter* (Arcade, Sega, 1984)



Possibly the only video game where the protagonist uses a tricycle as a means of transportation, *Spatter* will have you hooked from the very first second with its hyper-intense colors, bouncy music, and addictive gameplay. Your primary goal is to clear each maze by collecting flowers. The novel twist here is that you can

lean into the rubbery walls to both avoid and vanquish your enemies, depending which side you're on at the moment. This is why I love MAME; discovering obscure treasures like this one.

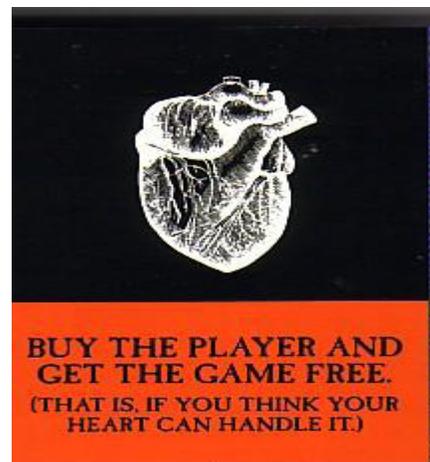
*Video Pinball* (dedicated Atari console, 1977)  
My favorite of Atari's pre-2600 dedicated consoles of the seventies, this unit contains seven different games. Four of the games are variations of Pinball, which look nothing like the 2600 version of *Video Pinball*—think *Video Olympics*, but a bit more colorful. Delightfully primitive and fun to play. Contains *Break-out* and two variations of *Rebound* for good measure. If you see this for cheap somewhere, snag it!

#### Sarah Szefer recommends:

*Dragon Quest Heroes: Rocket Slime* (Nintendo DS, Square Enix, 2006)  
This cute, overlooked *Dragon Quest* spinoff title starring a blue slime called Rocket is actually two games in one: an action adventure story where Rocket must save his friends, and boss tank battles (also playable in multiplayer mode). The tank battles are the highlight of the game; they're easy to learn and lots of fun to play.

*Tron 2.0 Killer App* (Game Boy Advance, Buena Vista Interactive, 2004)  
This isometric action game plunges you into the world of *Tron*, where you can play as the real *Tron* (Bruce Boxleitner) or a new program called Mercury (Rebecca Romijn). Three mini-games are playable: light cycle races, recognizer, and tank fights. Even better, you can also play the *Tron* and *Discs of Tron* arcade games... on a portable system!

*Looney Tunes Sheep Raider* (PlayStation, Infogrames, 2001)  
If you ever wanted to be Ralph the Wolf from the *Looney Tunes* cartoons, this is the game for you! This hilarious stealth game puts you in Ralph's role, as he tries to steal sheep without being caught by Sam the Sheepdog. Despite its cartoony look, this isn't an easy game! You'll soon be sweating at the sight of Sam running after you.



Right now, when you purchase a Magnavox CD-i 200 player and a Digital Video cartridge, we will put a 7th Guest CD-i game in your clammy little hand free of charge. Plus you get the cool game, *Kether*, which already comes packed inside the player box. Sure hope you have good medical coverage, buddy.



# STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

...CONTINUED

## Jared Bottorff recommends:

*FantaVision* (PlayStation 2, SCEA, 2000)

Anyone who knows anything about me knows that *FantaVision* is one of my favorite PS2 games. This is usually met with rolled eyes. Those who play it usually don't "get it", and those who do "get it" just think of it as nothing more than a silly little tech demo. But I think it's a great puzzler, and I place it among the ranks of such classics as *Yoshi's Cookie*, *Pala-medes*, and yes, *Tetris*. It kept me thoroughly occupied when the PS2 was a brand spankin' new machine. Plus, the cutscenes with the kids and the old doctor get an A for creepiness.

*WCW vs. NWO: World Tour* (Nintendo 64, THQ, 1997)

Around this time in my life, I got a taste of what multiplayer really meant when I had a group of friends who would come over and play some 4-player action on the Nintendo 64. If we weren't shooting each other in the face in *GoldenEye*, we were too busy grappling each other and piledriving them face first into the mat. It seems a bit ridiculous now, but this game provided great fun for four players, as the controls seemed a little easier to catch onto compared to its PlayStation counterparts, such as *WCW Nitro*. Plus, the create-a-character always turned up some interesting aliases. Ah, how we miss thee, "Russel The Love Muscle".

*Zillion* (Sega Master System, Sega, 1987)

Based on the anime of the same name, *Zillion* always seems to be well known amongst Master System nuts, but virtually unknown to the general populace. In this game, you must save your captured teammates by infiltrating an underground base. To do this, you must discover and insert codes to reach to the deeper levels of the base. Once everyone has been rescued, you set the main computer to self destruct and get your butt outta there before everyone goes up in flames with it. So what if it's essentially an *Impossible Mission* clone? My money's on it every time. Tip: avoid the sequel like the plague, which replaced thinking with twitching.

## Rob O'Hara recommends:

*Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars* (Nintendo DS, Rockstar Games, 2009)

Even after a week of shooting random people in the face, I still can't believe Rockstar Games was able to pull this game off on the Nintendo DS platform. *Chinatown Wars* stars Huang Lee, a Chinese punk who has no problem quickly finding trouble in Liberty City. (Has that even been a problem?) Rockstar has done a tremendous job of smoothly incorporating the DS touchscreen, which players will use to manually hot wire cars, defuse bombs and give tattoos, among other things. The bottom screen also serves as an interactive GPS, which routinely helps you get out of (or into) trouble. *Chinatown Wars* doesn't feel like a watered-down version of the *Grand Theft Auto* franchise at all; in fact, it feels like a whole new chapter that I'll be exploring (and shooting random people in the face) for quite some time.

*Skate 2* (PlayStation 3, EA Games, 2009)

Unlike Neversoft who attempts to reinvent its Tony Hawk franchise with each new release, EA Games kept things simple by retaining everything good about 2007's *Skate*, tweaked a few old features and added a few new ones, and ended up with *Skate 2*. New this time around are several new moves (including hand plants), the ability to move obstacles around to better create your own skate lines, more camera recording/playback options, and improved on-line play. *Skate 2* is creative, realistic, and the closest thing to real skating out there today.

*Buster Bros. Collection* (PlayStation, Capcom, 1997)

Capcom's *Buster Bros. Collection* for the PlayStation contains three different versions of *Buster Bros.* (*Buster Bros.*, *Super Buster Bros.*, and *Buster Buddies*), although "different" may be a stretch as they all play essentially the same. In *Buster Bros.* (also known as *Pang*), one or two players work their way across a world map, shooting and splitting bubbles until they're all gone while avoiding touching them (think *Asteroids*, but with gravity. And cuter.) All three games are fun solo and more fun with a friend. Compared to *Pang* for the original Game Boy and *Super Buster Bros.* for the Super Nintendo, *Buster Bros. Collection* for the PlayStation is the best "bang" for your buck.

## Chris Chandler recommends:

*Sonic Rush: Adventure* (Nintendo DS, Sega, 2007)

THIS is how Sonic should be done! Most Sonic games as of late have been pretty terrible, however the *Sonic Rush* series rarely fails to disappoint. Take everything you love about the 2-D Sonic, throw in some really cool 3-D boss battles, and add challenges for replay value and you have a great title. All the speed you love, none of the Were-hog, hover board, or awkward controls, just a solid 2-D platform title.

*Bloody Wolf* (TurboGrafx-16, NEC, 1990)

One of my first exposures to the TurboGrafx-16 system, this is one of those timeless classics that holds up almost 30 years later. *Bloody Wolf* is a multi-directional scrolling shooter, very similar to the likes of *Ikari Warriors* or *Contra* but with more depth. Starting out with only a gun and a knife, the player must traverse through many levels seeking out the President. Rescuing hostages, obtaining new weapons such as grenades and flame throwers, and finding secret items are all essentials of *Bloody Wolf*. The play control works well with the Turbo pad, and you will find yourself humming the music long after you are done playing. There also is a significant plot twist that is one of those video game moments you will not forget.

*Robot Tank* (Atari 2600, Activision, 1983)

I am always impressed by Activision Atari 2600 games; just take a look at how much data Activision can cram into a tiny cartridge. Featuring different types of weather such as fog, rain, and snow for your tank to traverse, as well as day versus night. Another neat feature is that the enemy can hit you and not necessarily kill you, but cripple your tank's radar, cannon, traction, or even the player's vision by occasionally blacking out the screen. The most impressive feature of this game is the kill screen; no Atari 2600 game can match the awesomeness on how you die in *Robot Tank*, just see for yourself.

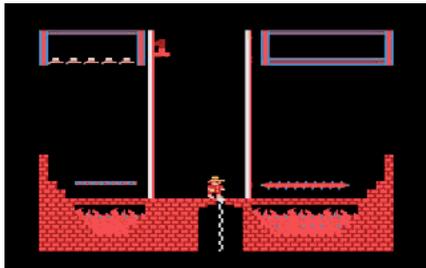
**Scott Stilphen recommends:**

*Agent USA* (Atari 8-bit, Scholastic Wizware, 1984)

Although it's an educational game and the premise is simple (find the fuzzbomb that's hiding out in some major US city), taking back infected cities is more enjoyable than actually winning the game. Plus it's got groovy theme music. Train travel and epidemics were never this much fun separately, let alone combined!

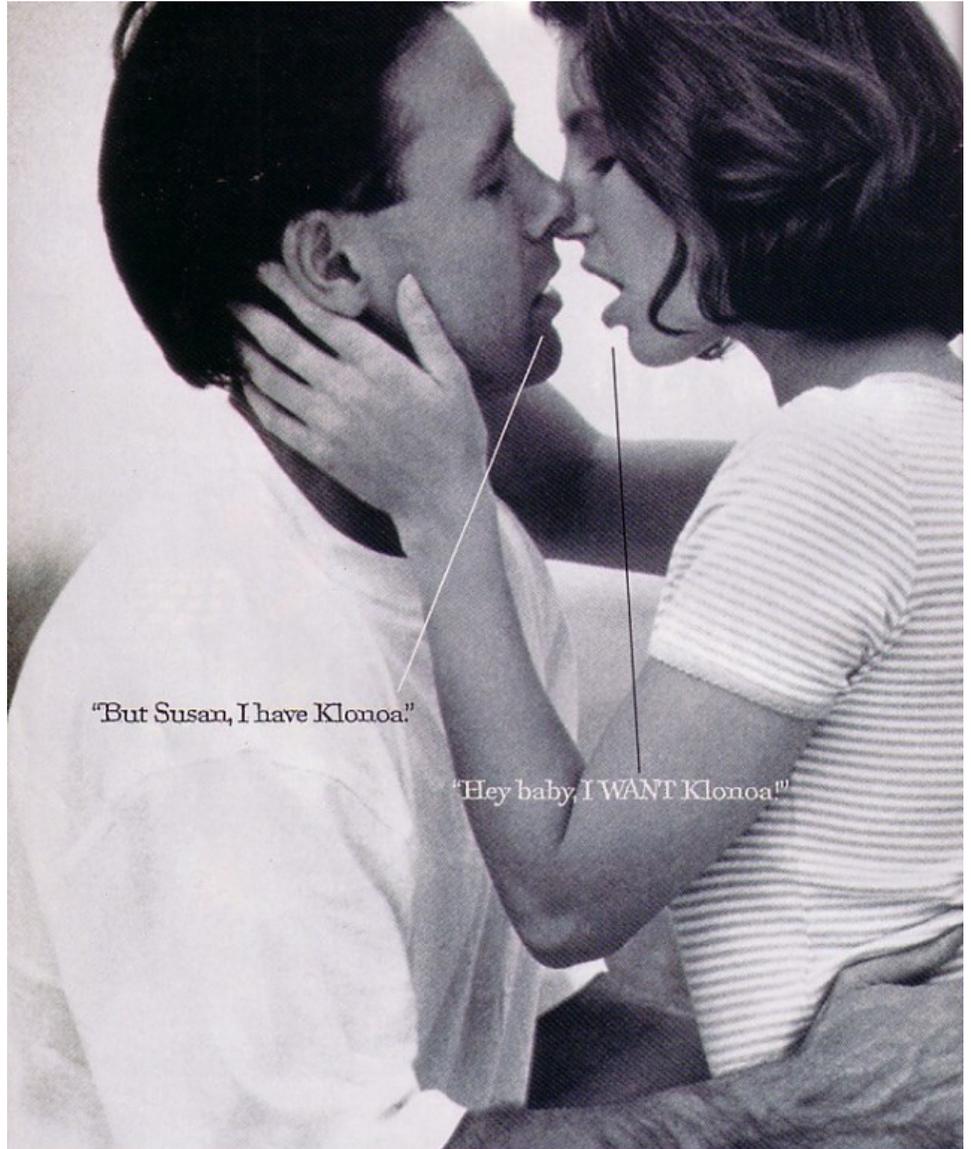
*Boulders & Bombs* (Atari 8-bit, CBS Software, 1982)

Unique twist on the tunneling genre with some cool "spacey" sound f/x. Dig a tunnel through dirt and boulders, from one side of the screen to the other, using an auger and time bombs. All the while, alien birds are dropping nuclear rods and cave fungus on yo head. The game gets challenging all too quickly but a recent glitch allows you to earn 255 lives, which really allows you to fully explore this overlooked title.



*Montezuma's Revenge* (Atari 8-bit, Parker Brothers, 1984)

I recently dug back into this classic, and even though I've spent countless hours playing it over the years, it's always fun to revisit. Very professional game from a then-16-year-old designer. And if you have a chance, the unreleased "demo" version is even better!



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